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## **Misguided Intentions**

U.S. Policy in World War II and Chinese Intervention in Korea

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in Asian Studies

by  
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## Introduction

In 1950, merely a year after the Communist Chinese victory over the Nationalist government in China, 600,000 Chinese soldiers began crossing the Yalu River into Korea to oppose the world's most powerful nation. Popular opinion accepts this war as a forgone conclusion, a natural consequence of the geopolitical domino game, a logical outcome of ensuing cold war polarity. Let's face it: China had gone Red, and like the Soviet Union in Europe, would naturally oppress its Asian neighbors into Communism, dropping its own "iron curtain" and opposing the "running dogs" of Western imperialism.

Whiting, in China Crosses the Yalu, asserts that the Chinese decision to intervene had its foundations in xenophobia and expansionism (Whiting, 5). Traditional Chinese distaste for westerners, combined with the more contemporary Communist view of the west as an antagonist, substantiated this first position. Expansionism, moreover, grew out of historical Chinese security concerns over the northern frontier.

All of these reasons have merit, and I am in no way suggesting that issues of *realpolitik* and ideological differences were not a factor. However, the most noteworthy works on this period commonly fail to relate one aspect of Sino-U.S. relations to the Chinese decision to intervene, and in doing so, also fail to address one key question: given the current state of China after a decades-long civil war, what made Mao Zedong think that he could defeat the world's most powerful country without losing the victory in China that he had just fought so hard to obtain? This question becomes even more difficult to answer when we consider an historical precedent of Chinese military involvement in Korea. Specifically, a succession of military campaigns to Korea

launched between 611-614, under remarkably similar circumstances, was an unqualified disaster that brought about the eventual ruin of the Sui Dynasty (589-618).

We can find a possible answer to this question in the history of Sino-U.S. relations during and immediately following World War II. In this period, the United States pursued policies that were far from being in China's best interest. Following a series of military and political policy decisions, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) not only lacked faith in the United States government but also lost a great deal of respect for America and her ability to place military objectives over political sensitivities. This subsequent loss of respect emboldened China to confront the United States in Korea; what the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party learned about the United States during World War II transformed what might seem like a gamble into an acceptable risk.

The following historical narrative will explain some specific American policies carried out during World War II, showing how those policies affected our relationship with the CCP. At the outset of the war, the U.S. stance in Asia was largely influenced by the colonial ambitions of its allies rather than by military judiciousness. Afraid of committing a political blunder and thus upsetting its European allies, the U.S. allowed Great Britain to define the Asian Theater in Eurocentric terms. It would take the British two years to finally decide on an organization that they were satisfied with, and in that time, the Japanese continued to press their advantage in Asia. When an operational framework was finally settled on, its very nature inhibited a strong war effort.

As the war continued, U.S. support for Chiang Kai-shek further compromised operational necessity. Poorly trained and led, his military and his government needed

radical reform. One American general, Joseph Stilwell, had the expertise not only to enhance the fighting potential of the Chinese Army, but also to lead them in a sound strategy that would defeat the Japanese. But Chiang opposed any such reform or U.S. leadership. He abhorred the thought of military cooperation with the Communists and refused to surrender significant command authority to Stilwell. Fearful of losing Chinese manpower in the allied war effort against Japan, the U.S. chose to mollycoddle Chiang. This policy escalated, soon costing Stilwell his position in the Asian Theater.

The final section in this drama covers the personalities and policies after Stilwell's recall. The postwar partitioning of China recalled the days of foreign excess in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Subsequently, the focus of American policy in China became clearly anti-Communist, generating tensions between the U.S. and the soon-to-be leaders of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Monroe Horn rightly points out that works on this period, generally speaking, agree that the U.S. policy toward China during World War II was a resounding failure. They dissent, however, on whether the correct policy should have been cooperation with the Communists or more active support of the Nationalists (325). Regardless, these works conclude their analyses at the end of World War II, failing to connect their conclusions to the next significant event involving China and the U.S.: The Korean War. As this *is* the sad consequence of ethnocentric American policies in China, let's begin by looking at why, for historical reasons, China's invasion of Korea may appear to be an unlikely course of action.

## The Land Beyond the Liao

*"Korean existence is closely linked with China's fate, just as the teeth are exposed without the lips and a broken door exposes the safety of a home."*<sup>1</sup>

If there is any question whether the PRC invasion of Korea was a risky enterprise, or whether the portent of history was large, one need only look back to the Sui Dynasty's (589-618) campaigns against Korea in the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Granted, an optimist could cite other more successful dynastic campaigns against Korea as justification for the expedition. For example, the Tang Dynasty (618-907), after several attempts, finally conquered Korea in the middle 600s.<sup>2</sup> Even more decisive was the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), which swiftly invaded Korea to deny Ming loyalists a sanctuary from which to stage an invasion.<sup>3</sup> However, neither of these examples is as instructive as the Sui campaigns, for as far as political and military conditions in China prior to a campaign against Korea are concerned, there is no closer parallel in Chinese history than that between the PRC and the Sui Dynasty.

Like the PRC, the Sui Dynasty was a fledgling government that had just united China after a long period of bloody conflict and disunity. The countryside had experienced much warfare in the past several years, and a respite from the demands of war would have been quite welcome. Outright hostile or at least unpredictable neighbors, who could have conceivably taken advantage of a distracted China, menaced. For the Sui

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<sup>1</sup>History of the Just Fatherland Liberation War of the Korean People, 137.

<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the Tang would eventually abandon Korea, following devastating military losses. Fairbank claims that this crushing loss of territory and the associated loss of military creditability directly impacted the Tang's downfall (Fairbank, China: A New History, 78). For details of the Tang campaigns, see Fitzgerald, 18-19, 187-191; and Tae Hung Ha, 21-23.

<sup>3</sup> See Rockhill, 10-32.

Dynasty it was the Turkic Khanates<sup>4</sup>; for the PRC, it was the recently fled Nationalist Army of Chiang Kai-shek. Finally, both were counting on significant assistance from neighbors, in a military operation against Korea.

Additionally, the leaders of these two governments were similarly capable, charismatic, and determined men who ruled autocratically, if not despotically. They were men of vision who sought to improve China's infrastructure, and consequently, the life of the average Chinese citizen. Sadly, both men were also driven, to the point of obsession in some instances, and were not easily dissuaded from a course of action. Paradoxically, they realized their visions at tremendous cost to both the state and the citizenry whom they originally intended to help.

At the turn of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, China extended into modern Manchuria to the Liao River (see map, page 9). Beyond the Liao, occupying the northern part of the Korean peninsula was the Kingdom of Koguryo, or in Chinese, Gaoli. Farther south, lay two other kingdoms Paekche, or Baiji, in the southwest and Silla, or Xinlo, in the southeast. Although the latter two kingdoms were much larger than Koguryo, they were by no means as powerful (Bingham, 37).

Of these three kingdoms, Koguryo was most troublesome to the Chinese. This is a geographical consequence more than anything else, as Koguryo was the only kingdom of the three to border China. Nonetheless, there was historical precedent for the tension.

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<sup>4</sup> Do not confuse these Turks with their modern-day namesakes in Asia Minor. The original Turkic tribes were nomadic peoples whose loose confederations stretched from Korea to Central Asia and north to the steppes of Russia. The map on page 9 depicts their location using a romanized version of their Chinese name, T'u-chüeh.



The last of the Han Dynasty's (202 BC-AD 220) colonies to survive was located in Koguryo<sup>5</sup>. This colony remained until 313, when proud and resentful inhabitants, realizing that genuine Han power no longer existed, finally destroyed it. Thus, the people of Koguryo, more than the other neighboring state, knew what it was to have Chinese influence in their kingdom. Ironically, because of its historical associations with China, Koguryo, the most troublesome of the Korean kingdoms, had become most closely acculturated to China (Kim, 3).

In the political terms of the Sui Dynasty, the Empire of Koguryo was a tributary state. The idea of a tributary state grew out of China's sinocentric attitude toward its neighbors. To Chinese minds, since their country was the strongest and their culture far superior to any other nations', surrounding countries would naturally realize their own inadequacy and offer gifts to China out of respect. In short, the tributary system defined the "world order" in Chinese terms (Fairbank, 12). The historical precedence of Koguryo's vassalage to China under the Han made her an *ipso facto* vassal in the eyes of the new Sui leadership.

Diplomatically speaking, the tribute system was as important a concept for maintaining security as a strong military is today. In other words, a country that offered tribute was not considered a threat, as it had willingly admitted obedience to the Son of Heaven. The tributary system was also an effective economy of force measure. Rather than dispatching troops to occupy a territory or establishing a local Chinese government, the Chinese could maintain control over the area with the minimum allowable effort.

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<sup>5</sup> "Frontier agricultural colonization...became the standard plan of development" in Han China (Chang, 650).

The Turkic Khanates of Inner Asia also flirted with tributary status. The Turks were a proto-Tibetan nomadic enterprise whose influence stretched from the Great Wall<sup>6</sup> north to the Orkhon River, in what is currently Outer Mongolia. Playing the same role that the Xiongnu had played during the Han Dynasty, the Turks threatened the security of China's northern frontier.

We know little of the Turks from their own records. The only surviving self-testimonies are the famed Orkhon inscriptions, four of which stand in the remote reaches of Inner Asia. We can tell from reading these memorial pillars that the Turks were fearsome mounted warriors, who took great pride and joy in battle and who regarded the Chinese with disdain, often warning future generations to avoid the tricks of Chinese acculturation.<sup>7</sup>

We also know from the Sui chronicles that there was a schism within the Turkic enterprise during the reign of Yangdi (r. 604-618). Namely, the Turks had divided into an eastern and western branch. Recognizing dissension and potential conflict, the Chinese sought to benefit and weaken both threats. One method they employed preyed upon the classic issue of nomadic adaptation: succession.<sup>8</sup> When a nomadic khan died, a battle for succession generally began. The Chinese realized that into this struggle they could

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<sup>6</sup> I invoke the Great Wall here not in terms of an easily identifiable structure, but rather in the way that Waldron and Lattimore defined it: as the demarcation between pastoral and nomadic adaptations. Refer Waldron's "The Problem with the Great Wall of China" and Lattimore's "The Geography of Chingis Khan."

<sup>7</sup> See Tekin's translations. The striking paradox of the inscriptions is that despite exhorting future generations to avoid the Chinese as people who would deceive "by means of their sweet words and soft materials" and then "plan their ill will", the Turks would employ Chinese artisans in their own court (262, 281). This is one of the few first hand testimonies by a nomadic people indicating that sinicization was, in fact, working.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the problem of nomadic succession, see Barth's case study of the Basseri tribe of Persia, pp.82-86. In light of his observations, it becomes apparent how the Chinese could manipulate the succession process to their benefit.

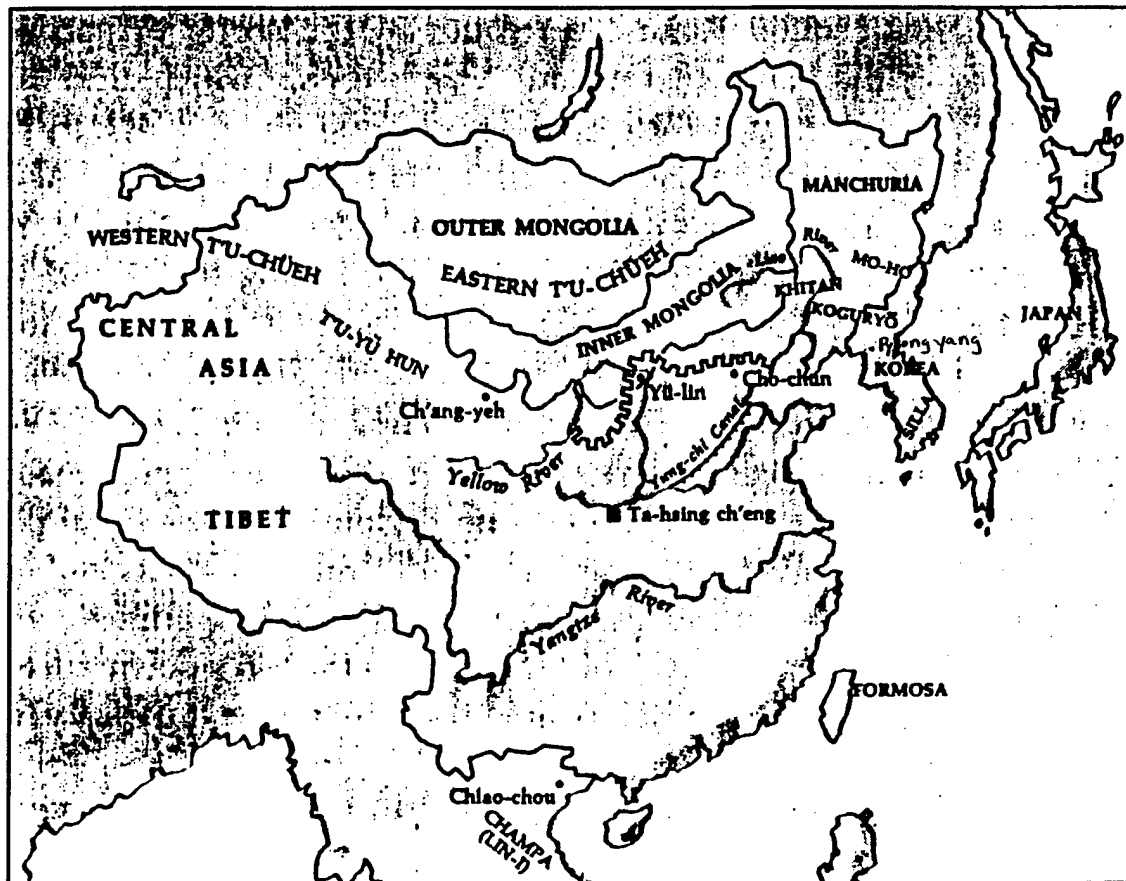
interpose their own choice for ruler and thus have an ally heading what once was a hostile barbarian neighbor. This is precisely what the Chinese had done to the Eastern Turks in 603, when Qimin was installed as khan, and in 610, when the Chinese placed Shekui in control of the Western Turks (Bingham, 28).

The other diplomatic method the Chinese employed was the concept of *yi yi fa yi*, or using barbarians against barbarians.<sup>9</sup> In this manner, the Chinese could preserve their own resources by employing the assistance of another barbarian ‘ally’ to defeat a more imminent threat. I use the word ally loosely, as this alliance was only one of convenience and not substance. Someone allied with the Chinese today could find himself being maneuvered against by them tomorrow. The Chinese made great use of this technique after the schism, attempting to keep both factions relatively weak. More relevant to this discussion, however, is that Yangdi sought the assistance of the Eastern Turks against Koguryo, as this branch of the Turks, at the time of the Korean campaigns, was the most hostile to the Chinese (Bingham, 28).

Nonetheless, the situation on the northern frontier was the least of China's difficulties at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. China had recently reunited after almost 300 years of barbarian rule, disunity, and turbulence. The new emperor, Wendi (r. 581-604), the first Sui emperor, was unifying the country, defeating opponents, and attempting to establish institutions with which to govern the state.

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<sup>9</sup> Ying-shih Yü writes extensively on the concept of *yi yi fa yi* or *yi yi zhi yi* in Trade and Expansion in Han China. Although originally a literal application, whereby defeated barbarian forces were rearmed and incorporated into the Chinese Army to fight against other barbarian forces, broader techniques were employed as Chinese foreign policy became more sophisticated. For example, the Chinese would use material incentives to encourage dissension among barbarians groups. This technique was only effective when dealing with several smaller tribes rather than one powerful nomadic enterprise (15). Chun-shu Chang points out that this technique was a fundamental tenet of Chinese foreign policy at the time (650).



Reprinted from The Sui Dynasty, by Arthur Wright.

As if this were not enough, in 597 the Koguryo Emperor, Gao Yuan (r. 590-617), in conjunction with Qitan and Moho tribesman, conducted raids into Chinese territory. Since Koguryo was a vassal state, China did not expect it to be belligerent. Furthermore, there were more important missions for the military: fighting the Turks and unifying the south, to name two (Wright, 192). As a result, the border between China and Koguryo was guarded lightly, if at all. Although the raids were presumably not costly in terms of life or property, they were nonetheless a great affront to the sovereignty of the Son of Heaven.

More critically, however, a hostile Korea posed potential danger to Chinese security. At worst case, Wendi envisioned Koguryo allying with the Turks, and in doing so, creating a united threat along most of China's frontier. Thus, with a hostile force to his north and west, a naughty vassal challenging his east, social unrest in the south and a lack of diplomatic institutions to deal with major external threats, Wendi invaded Koguryo.

Although his expedition failed to meet its military objectives, it did succeed in temporarily putting Gao Yuan in his place. After Wendi returned to China, the Koguryo emperor sent tribute, as a reaffirmation of his vassalage (Bingham 38). Wendi's experience with Koguryo make the response of his son, Yangdi, more understandable, when, after ten years of good relations, Gao Yuan, once again, defied his overlord.

In 607, on a routine trip to the northern frontier, Yangdi unexpectedly met the Khan of the Eastern Turks, Qimin, who told him that the Emperor of Koguryo had

recently sent a delegation to the Turkic camp.<sup>10</sup> Yangdi's immediate sentiment is one of contempt for the Emperor Gao Yuan. Fearing what his father feared, an alliance between the Turks and the Koreans, he dismissed the emissaries from the Turkic camp, ordering them to tell Gao Yuan to personally pay tribute and account for his actions (Wright, 190-1). If not, Yangdi continued, he would "certainly make a tour of inspection in his [Gao Yuan's] territory." (Bingham, 38)<sup>11</sup> The Emperor of Koguryo refused to pay homage to the Sui court, and in this affront, Yangdi saw an opportunity both to recoup his father's failure and to bring Koguryo once and for all under Chinese control.

Yangdi's concern was by no means an overreaction. Instead, he heeded Sunzi, who underscored the importance of enemy alliances. On this subject, the military historian Du Yu warns, "Do not allow your enemies to get together." Wang Xi added, "if an enemy has alliances, the problem is grave and the enemy's position strong." (Sun Tzu, 78) This admonition was twice as weighty for Yangdi, as his two enemies were allying with each other. He correctly assumed that no good could come of this situation.

Following this revelation, Sui Yangdi began strategic preparations for the inevitable mobilization against Koguryo. The most notable of these measures was continued work on the canal system. Specifically, a stretch was constructed extending north from the Grand Canal in the direction of Zhuojun<sup>12</sup>, the site of present day Beijing.

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<sup>10</sup> The details of this encounter are open to conjecture. Whether Qimin, a Khan who had good relations with the Sui Dynasty, had invited or welcomed the delegation is unknown. More likely, the delegation was meeting with an opposition group of Turks in Qimin's camp. As Qimin would be replaced the following year, and his successor was markedly hostile toward the Chinese, the Koguryo delegation was there on the behest of Qimin's successor, and Qimin lacked the power or ability to eject them.

<sup>11</sup> Bingham, in his work on the fall of Sui, comments that the word used for territory here, *bitu*, is clearly pejorative, connoting not only Yangdi's perception of authority over Koguryo, but also his feelings of superiority (38*n*).

<sup>12</sup> Depicted as Cho-chun on the map, page 9.

Well into the construction, Yangdi had yet to position troops in Zhuojun. Thus the start of construction in 607, a full five years before the next military operation would take place, indicates Yangdi's "far-sightedness in planning for the subjugation of Korea." (Bingham, 38-9) This statement intimates that one of Yangdi's major national policy objectives was the conquest of Korea.

Although Yangdi did take measures to mobilize his country in preparation for upcoming operations, there were still some glaring deficiencies by 611, when the northern extension of the canal was finally completed. Continued combat with the Turks caused a manpower and supply shortage. By now, Shipi, a hostile khan, had assumed leadership over the Eastern Turks, and had been, for the past three years, causing significant trouble for the empire. "Soldiers and horses were much diminished" by the fighting, and consequently, Yangdi would not be putting his best foot forward as he invaded Korea (Bingham, 39).

Furthermore, conditions on the homefront were not the best for undertaking a military operation of that scope. It is common knowledge that the building of the Grand Canal devastated China's manpower resources. On top of this problem, came one with even more coincident military applicability: a flood of the lower Yellow River that affected 40 commanderies (Wright, 192). Given the grave domestic situation, it was unthinkable to continue with the campaign plans. Dou Jiande, writing at the time, expressed his disbelief that the Emperor would continue with his plans:

In the time of Emperor Wen, the empire was flourishing and prosperous. He sent out a host of a million in order to attack 'East of the Liao'. And yet it was defeated by Koguryo. Now that the waters have overflowed causing calamity and that the common people are poor and in distress, yet the Lord Emperor shows no consideration for their plight, but he personally is marching to the Liao River. (Bingham, 40)

His observation that the emperor did not consider the "plight" of his people is significant. Concern for the people was one of the basic duties of a ruler, if he was to possess the Mandate of Heaven. Dou's statement foreshadows Yangdi's eventual downfall and the collapse of the empire.

Nonetheless, Yangdi launched, in the spring of 612, his first campaign against Koguryo. Yangdi chose to attack the border city of Liaodong head-on, laying siege to it. The besieged held out until the end of August, at which time, the imperial forces, low on morale, supplies and manpower, retreated (Wright, 193). To complicate matters, harsh winter weather assailed the departing soldiers. As if that weren't enough, their return to China, rather than being marked by jubilation, was commemorated by drought and famine. In all, several hundred thousand were left dead on the eastern reaches of the Sui empire (Bingham, 42).

As a condition for success in wartime, one must at a minimum have domestic stability, if not tranquility. Yangdi had neither in 613, when he returned to the Liao River. No sooner had he begun his march north than rebellion broke out in his rear, jeopardizing not only his lines of communication, but also his very reign. The death knell to this expedition, however, was the loss of leadership. Terrified by reports of a



successful uprising, Yangdi had no choice but to dispatch his most loyal and ablest generals to suppress the rebellion (Wright, 193).

The next year, the empire was a whirl of chaos. Continued uprisings brought the China to the brink of civil war. Lawlessness abounded, and the immediate military consequence was a lack of war-horses, as various rebel leaders sought them for their own military endeavors. Illegal activity reached such a height that "people all over the empire were terrorized to the extent that nine out of ten became bandits" (Bingham, 45). Yet despite this state of affairs, plans for another campaign continued.

In 614, with the country in shambles, the emperor enlisted what citizens he could for a final attempt at defeating Koguryo. We can only imagine that the extent of his frustration must have brought him to the brink of obsession. The more he tried to subdue the renegade leader of Koguryo, the more his own problems worsened. However, he simply could not stop now. He undoubtedly felt that a decisive victory over Koguryo would be balm to the troubled empire.

Desperate, the emperor sought to redress the failures of the past two years and also invoke the glories of earlier dynasties. Yangdi ordered burial rites performed and temples constructed to honor the dead of previous campaigns. He spoke often of the founders of the Shang and Later Han, their military victories and imperial successes. Although he expressed regret over the disastrous results of his previous endeavors, he nevertheless continued with his plans (Wright, 193-4).

This time, the domestic situation further exacerbated mobilization:

Bandits and rebels arose like bees. People in great numbers were uprooted from their homes, while communities were cut off from one another to the point of isolation. The armies in many cases failed to keep on schedule time. (Bingham, 46)

Civil unrest notwithstanding, the Chinese successfully reached Pyongyang.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the Koreans, equally as exhausted by the three years of warfare, surrendered before the Chinese could achieve a decisive victory, agreeing to send a delegation to acknowledge Chinese suzerainty (Bingham, 46). This was all fine and well, but Yangdi went to war because he wanted the Emperor of Koguryo himself to come to the court; still he refused. Subsequently,

the Emperor ordered the armies to stand by and again planned a later expedition. But at this point, the empire being in great confusion, he was therefore not able to go again.(Bingham, 49)

Yangdi finally realized that his only alternative was to accept the final “victory” as conclusive. In formal proclamations, the wars against Koguryo were complete and the empire successful. In a poem, Yangdi wrote:

Return the army and feast in our capital.  
First the songs and then the dances  
to show the army’s might,  
Drink victory libations, take off your campaign robes.  
In our judgement, we have not uselessly gone  
on a thousand-mile campaign,  
Nor have we returned in vain, from Five Plain Pass.  
(Wright, 194)

If Yangdi truly believed this, then it attests sadly to his psychological state following this five-year ordeal. Realistically, this was a public relations ploy designed to appeal to

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<sup>13</sup> Capital of both Koguryo and modern North Korea.

future generations as they sought to understand Sui history. Either way, the physical evidence of disaster was so overwhelming, that poetic phrases or official proclamations could in no way obscure the realities of the Korean expeditions.

The disastrous domestic situation, which not only cost manpower and supplies, also did not allow Yangdi to focus his full attention on the defeat of Korea. This explanation satisfactorily accounts for the lack of success during the entire four-year period, but not the first campaign. Obviously, if the first campaign had succeeded in subduing Koguryo, China's social and economic situation would not have deteriorated as rapidly, if at all.

Many historians have cited terrain, weather, and enemy defenses as reason for Yangdi's failure. I would argue that these were factors in his defeat, but as these variables are always present in combat, one cannot simply wish the battle analysis away by blaming them for defeat. Military command requires leaders to find ways to minimize the impact of adverse conditions and continue to the overall objective. Yangdi's failure as supreme commander of the expedition lies in his disregard of this leadership principle.

For example, the area that Yangdi had to cross before he even reached the Korean frontier was hostile territory. The tribes that occupied the land between the Liao and the Yalu, were not staunchly allegiant to the Sui. As a result, Yangdi had to fight his way to the battlefield, expending precious energy, manpower, and resources before he even had first contact with Koguryo's forces. Additionally, this arrangement meant that Yangdi's lines of communication stretched through unsecured territory. Given the tremendous logistical requirements of an invasion force, this was an unwise military gamble. Last,

this precarious situation would make retrograde operations even more costly; in addition to the arrival of winter, it accounts for the rather significant loss of life during the retreat.

This brings up the diplomatic issue of allegiances. Yangdi failed to gain the allegiance of the two main Manchurian tribes, the Khitan and the Moho. Had he done so, he would have had easier access to the Liao River and more secure logistical routes to the rear. He also had difficulties enlisting support of the Turk forces, an addition that would have relieved the manpower shortage. Although some mercenary Turk forces did join in the expedition, it was nothing like the full-fledged support of the Eastern Turks for which Yangdi hoped (Bingham, 55).

Yangdi's scheme of maneuver brings up additional problems. Yangdi was stopped by a series of walled cities south of the Liao River. Failing to observe Sunzi's advice that cities must be engaged only as a last resort, he tried to neutralize each fortification before moving on (Sun Tzu, 78). Military doctrine, moreover, calls for the isolation and bypass of cities or fortifications, and their subsequent elimination as a "mopping up" procedure. The Koreans could not have established an uninterrupted Maginot Line extending across the neck of the peninsula that would have made procedure impossible. Furthermore, considering the state of weaponry at the time, it is reasonable to say that a force could have penetrated at a spot between fortifications without being engaged by enemy weapons.

Looking at the operation a little less critically, Yangdi's rationale for not approaching the walled cities doctrinally is obvious: this was a punitive expedition. As such, the amount collateral damage he could cause was a measure of his success. What Yangdi failed to understand, however, was the relative cost of his immediate actions and

the military principle of objective. It was too late once he realized that the key to punishing Koguryo lay not in Mukden<sup>14</sup>, but rather in Pyongyang.

As Qiang Zhai wrote, “historical parallels [were] inescapable to Mao and his lieutenants, who took history seriously.” (696) Mao himself quoted from history extensively in his writings. Therefore, it is more than reasonable to assume that he was, at a minimum, familiar, if not well versed, with Sui Yangdi’s abortive and eventually catastrophic attempt to subdue Korea. Modern dynastic historians agree that a causal link exists between the tragic failure of these campaigns and the eventual collapse of the Dynasty (Bingham, 2). Given that link, and the tremendous risk involved, the next issue to address is why Mao Zedong would take such a chance, especially given the increased ability of the enemy? The answer to this question lies in the understanding of the Allied involvement in China during World War II, with specific attention to Great Britain’s concern for her Empire, the military organization of the Asian Theater, and the actions of the military leaders fighting against Japan.

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<sup>14</sup> A fortified town along the Liao River.

## Allies and Allegiances

*“ ‘War by Committee’ is a bust. ”*

---Stilwell<sup>15</sup>

With few exceptions, Eurocentrism characterized allied involvement and the formulation of strategy in China and Southeast Asia at the onset of the war. Although China would become a major part of the war effort against Japan, many of Europe's political and military leaders only cared about China's survival inasmuch as it would benefit their own countries' interests. For the most part, they failed to approach China as a nation fighting for her own survival and determination. This attitude would impede those U.S. military and Foreign Service officers who did have China's best interest in mind.

From a territorial standpoint, British interests in Asia far exceeded those of the United States. As a result, the British took the lead in mobilizing forces and dividing the theater into areas of responsibility. Thus, by the time the U.S. joined the Asian war effort, the command structure was predisposed toward preserving Britain's empire, rather than stemming Japanese power and liberating Asia.

Renewed U.S. involvement in China coincided with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and America's entry into World War II. By then, the Japanese had completed four years of brutal militarism in China, following an invasion in 1937. The Japanese considered that invasion a punitive measure in response to a minor clash of Chinese and Japanese

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<sup>15</sup> Stilwell, pg. 247.

troops at the Marco Polo Bridge.<sup>16</sup> This invasion was the prelude to an eight-year occupation of China and part of Japan's campaign of military expansion in Asia and the Pacific.

China was powerless against the invaders. Already weary after years of civil war, the population fell victim to the atrocities of the Japanese military. Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army, aside from having internal problems, was no match for the modern, well-trained Japanese military. Additionally, he could not focus his entire efforts on defeating the invaders. The Communist threat weighed heavily on his mind, precluding any serious effort to defeat the Japanese. Although the Nationalists and Communists would form a "united front" to fight the Japanese, this association lacked any true commitment on either end. Chiang refused to fully cooperate with his Communist rivals, fearful that they would gain leverage if allowed free reign to participate against the Japanese. Likewise, the Communists, relatively secure in the caves of Yenan and still smarting from the treachery of their first "united front" experience, were reluctant to let down their guard under the guise of a concerted war effort.<sup>17</sup>

So the Japanese continued unchecked. China represented only one campaign, albeit a critical one, in their overall strategy of Asian-Pacific conquest. With a large portion of China under their control—to include Manchuria, coastal China and Canton—the Japanese could extend their lines of communication downward to the South China

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<sup>16</sup> Japanese forces were present in various locations throughout China. In this particular instance, Japanese troops from the occupied northeast were allegedly conducting maneuvers in the vicinity of Beijing when they encountered Chinese soldiers. The Japanese contend that one of their soldiers was wrongfully captured and detained by Chinese soldiers (Kozumplik, 49).

<sup>17</sup> In 1923, the CCP joined the Nationalist government in the first "united front". Four years later, in a bloody reversal, Chiang purged the CCP and began a military campaign aimed at their destruction (Kozumplik, 37, 41).

Sea. This would allow them to begin their advance to the final objective: the European colonies of South and Southeast Asia, rich in the natural resources that the small archipelago of Japan lacked.

As far as the European powers were concerned, the timing of the Japanese actions could not have been worse. By 1940, both France and the Netherlands were effectively conquered by Germany; whatever troops could have been mustered for a colonial defense had either been killed, captured, or were still fighting for what remained of a free Europe. Only the British were able to dedicate significant resources to the defense of Asia, although concerns about that island's future loomed. Still, the prospect of halting Japanese aggression in Asia was grim.

The European powers felt that only U.S. military power could foil the Japanese plans. A committee headed by General Marshall and Admiral Stark, and advised by none other than Owen Lattimore, agreed, concluding that none of the European colonial powers could withstand an attack from the Japanese without U.S. assistance (Tuchman, 288). Nonetheless, by this time, as far as most of the Asian Theater was concerned, U.S. entry in the war, welcome or not, could little affect any significant defensive strategy. The Japanese were already in an excellent position for a continued offensive, and when they struck at Pearl Harbor, they simultaneously fell upon the eastern edge of Southeast Asia, besieging a major portion of America's force projection potential in the Philippines.

The U.S. was firmly committed to waging war in Asia and the Pacific by January of 1942. As in the European Theater, the specter of total defeat at the hands of the Japanese encouraged the allied powers to create a unified command to wage coalition warfare. A unified command has several advantages over each force fighting its own



separate war against the same enemy. Foremost is that a unified command structure, in theory, is the best way to achieve unity of effort (Dept. of the Army, 4-2).

Writing in the aftermath of the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the British strategist J.F.C. Fuller wrote that the Principle of Unity of Effort, or co-operation as he termed it, “is the cementing principle which holds all others together...[and] spells military efficiency.” (Fuller, 15-16) Although his original comments referred to the concept of national unity, his theories have been successfully applied to combined warfare. Without unity of effort, whether by consensus building or direct authority, a coalition will, at the very least, be rife with jealousy, infighting, selfishness, and suspicion: anathema to a successful command environment. Sadly, these adjectives describe the allied command atmosphere of the Asian Theater.

Asia had seen coalition warfare by 1941. Combined allied forces operated in China during both the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellion. Thus, when Churchill pushed for a unified allied command in the Far East, his idea was not without historical precedent. His suggestions were, however, primarily motivated by his concern for British interests, namely the colonies of India, Burma, Singapore, and the Malay Peninsula.

Churchill had one, more critical concern. Were the entire world war effort not fought on a coalition basis, he feared that the United States, considering the Japanese threat to the Pacific coast more pressing than the German threat in the Atlantic, would not fully support the European war, devoting most of its resources to Asia (Patti, 8). By Churchill’s reckoning, this would prove disastrous for Europe and went completely against his “Europe First” philosophy. By proposing coalition warfare, Churchill offered

assistance to the U.S., while also securing a U.S. commitment to the war effort in Europe. Coalition warfare therefore satisfied Churchill in two ways: first, it assured him of U.S. assistance in defending the Asian portion of the British Empire; second, it guaranteed America's equal participation on both fronts.

The first allied command was an American-British-Dutch-Australian organization headed by General Sir Archibald P. Wavell. The striking thing about this command is that China was not included within its structure. Both Churchill and Roosevelt, along with their respective foreign policy and military advisors agreed that China would never agree to foreign control. Thus, they concluded that Chiang Kai-shek should command an independent Chinese effort (Bradley, 210).

Yet it was sheer folly to expect this arrangement to work. The British were not the least bit concerned about the war in China, and Chiang was equally as apathetic toward Britain's colonial difficulties. Predictably, disputes between Chiang and Wavell over priority of effort and allocation of resources jeopardized all allied operations in the area (Tuchman, 303). Furthermore, the British lacked the strategic perspective to realize that the defeat of the Japanese in China could only benefit their war efforts in Southeast Asia.

Roosevelt, on the other hand, had a vastly different perspective. "If China goes under," he wrote to his son, "how many divisions of Japanese troops do you think will be freed?" (Patti, 8) Thus was born FDR's concern with the fate of China. Meanwhile, as the alliance wallowed in indecision, Japan continued to mount successes in the Far East. Churchill realized that he would lose his vital interests in the area if he did not think about England first and the coalition second.

Therefore, despite earlier conclusions that the British could not single-handedly defeat the Japanese, Churchill proposed a theatre-wide reorganization. The current level of inactivity and dissention drove him to accept the risk of opposing Japan alone; at least then, he concluded, he could have a decisive say in the defense of the British colonies. The first coalition subsequently disintegrated into commands formed along special interest lines. The United States essentially received control over the entire Pacific Operation, with the exception of everything that was British. Wavell, as Supreme Commander, India, would run an independent operation that stretched from Singapore, west to the Suez (Bradley, 210). Not surprisingly, within 5 months, the British had lost Singapore, the Malay Peninsula and most of Burma.

The misfortunes that befell the first World War II attempt at a Far East coalition prefigured the difficulties that would plague its successor. As a result of the devastating defeats, a year later, at the Quebec Conference, the topic of a revamped Asian command resurfaced. Churchill pushed for the creation of the Southeast Asian Command (SEAC) in a moment of angst, as he realized that Britain must mobilize a strong allied effort in Asia if it ever expected to regain its lost colonial holdings and hold on to what it still had. In Churchill's worst case scenario, a loosely organized handful of British units would be summarily defeated by the Japanese, first in the remainder of Burma and then in India (Patti, 11). This having been done, given Britain's manpower limitations, the chance of a British force regaining these colonies was highly doubtful.

However, an allied coalition would not end Churchill's worries about the Empire. In a very likely scenario, Churchill envisioned American forces fighting their way through Asia and *truly* liberating the continent: both from the Japanese and from the

British. FDR was markedly anti-colonialist and had said on more than one occasion that he had no interest in supporting plans to regain European colonies simply for the sake of returning them to their overlords (Tuchman, 188). In other words, the U.S. would fight the Japanese in South and Southeast Asia as long as it was part of the overall strategy to defeat Japan. SEAC, in Churchill's mind, would prevent this. British-led, it would have the Crown's best interests in mind; U.S. supported, it would have the military strength to maintain the Empire.<sup>18</sup>

Theoretically, the creation of SEAC was designed to improve command and control within Asia and help coordinate resources for allied victory. Actually, protectionism, territoriality, and selfishness that precluded a genuine allied effort characterized the organization. Mountbatten's sole focus, in keeping with Churchill's guidance, was on the reclamation or protection of British colonies in South and Southeast Asia. Japanese defeat and their removal from China was a secondary concern, if one at all.

Unlike Europe or the Pacific, where Eisenhower and MacArthur respectively had uncompromised control over all terrain and resources, the Asian Theater had no such unified leader. Mountbatten could care less what happened in China. Furthermore, he failed to reorganize the Asian Theater in a way that made operational sense: Burma,

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<sup>18</sup> Churchill later realized that colonialism was anachronistic. Compare his attitude ten years later, when the French, their besieged troops facing annihilation at Dien Bien Phu, requested British aid: "I have suffered Singapore, Hong Kong, Tobruk; the French will have Dien Bien Phu..." (Fall, 310).

perhaps the paramount piece of key terrain in the theater, lay astride the operational boundaries of both the Far East and Middle East boundaries (Tuchman, 307).<sup>19</sup>

As a result, nobody was truly in overall charge of what happened between China and India, and SEAC's own structure destined the organization to inefficiency. Colonel Archimedes Patti, an officer assigned to the theater, described the complex situation as:

four theaters, three geographic and one operational, representing, respectively, the interests of three nations and the three services all operating in the same area. SEAC was to be an Anglo-American command which included Burma, Ceylon, Sumatra, and Malaya—but not India. India was under the India Command with responsibilities toward the Middle East where Indian divisions were fighting, as well as to the Far East. In China was, of course, Chiang's China Theater. The American operational theater, CBI [China, Burma, India], operated in all three geographical areas. It was not subordinate to SEAC. (Patti, 11)

This complex and nepotistic arrangement was the perfect setting in which to play out the political tragedy that would cost America its respect in the eyes of the PRC leadership after the end of World War II.

Caught in the middle of this tangle of authority was America's only hope for success in China, Joseph P. Stilwell. As the senior American military officer in SEAC, with primary responsibilities in China, Stilwell, more so than any other individual, had the ability to positively influence the relationship between the U.S. and China. His past

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<sup>19</sup> Doctrinally speaking, *key terrain* is that which provides whomever holds it a critical advantage over his opponent. Burma is just such a location. As long as the British held it, the lines of communication were maintained between their base in India and the portion of their empire in Southeast Asia. Were the Japanese to hold it, they would not only isolate British possessions in Southeast Asia, but also block a withdrawal route for Chiang's Nationalist forces.

experiences in China and his comprehensive understanding of the country and its people gave him a perspective that few westerners had.

During his tenure there, he and his staff not only gained the respect of Chinese soldiers, but also of the CCP leadership. The support of this latter group becomes particularly important when we discuss the possibility of forestalling or avoiding the Sino-U.S. conflict in Korea. Stilwell advocated military cooperation with the Chinese Communists to defeat the Japanese. His efforts, however, were strongly opposed by Chiang Kai-shek, who sought to isolate rather than incorporate the Communists in the wartime operation. The formulation of U.S. policy in China would hinge on this and other fundamental disagreements between Stilwell and Chiang. Stilwell's background and training provide superb insight into how he became the U.S. military's preeminent China expert. Moreover, the story of his final ordeal in China is likewise the story of flawed U.S. policy.

## East Meets West

*"No study is possible on the battlefield; to do even a little,  
one must already know a great deal and know it well"*  
---Ferdinand Foch<sup>20</sup>

Joseph Stilwell was an old China-hand and no stranger to the Middle Kingdom. A 1904 graduate of the United States Military Academy, Stilwell first visited China in 1911 on a visit from his duty station in the Philippines. He traveled extensively through China and made extremely insightful observations about its culture and current affairs. Following service in World War I, Stilwell urged for and received appointment as a Chinese language officer, essentially an attaché in training.

Stilwell began his language training at the University of California, Berkeley. A year later, he went to China and continued his studies at the North China Union Language School, an academy started at the turn of the century to train missionaries. After completing initial language training, the language officer was now free to travel, acquainting himself with the country and also accomplishing whatever information gathering missions the attaché may have had. During this time, Stilwell undertook rather strenuous but invaluable assignments. He went to Shanxi to give engineering advice on a road construction program, braved the Manchurian winter to report on the progress of Japan's evacuation of Siberia, and observed famine relief efforts. He also had the pleasure of meeting with some of the more notorious warlords of China's fragmented 1920s, such as Yan Xishan and the "Christian General" Feng Yuxiang. The warlord period afforded Stilwell the opportunity to observe China's military. Stilwell saw

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<sup>20</sup> Unified allied commander of the Western Front during World War I.

saw warlord forces preparing for and returning from combat, and consequently, their state of readiness and discipline.

Returning stateside in 1923, Stilwell attended two professional military schools. His completion of the second school, the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, qualified him to command at the battalion level. As fate would have it, a command became available shortly after he graduated; it was for a battalion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Tianjīn.

At that time, the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment was the Army's Far East vanguard. With three battalions, it had posts in China and the Philippines. The Boxer Rebellion first brought the unit to China in 1900. A decade later, between 1911 and 1912, the Regiment would take up a permanent post in China to protect the diplomatic legation. Security was the unit's main mission, and it conducted both patrols of routes in its area of operations and reconnaissance of warlord armies that came within Regiment's area of interest.



*A Chinese dragon and the Pidgin English phrase "Can do", symbols of service in China, still adorn the crest of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.*

Reprinted from the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment Association website, [www.benning-army.mil](http://www.benning-army.mil)



Stilwell had invaluable opportunities for professional development during his service with the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment. As a battalion commander, he could improve his tactical and leadership skills. Furthermore, given the perishable nature of Chinese, he also had a welcomed chance to improve his language proficiency. More importantly, his assignment would provide him with three things that would virtually predetermine his place in history as the United States Army's premier China expert.

First, Stilwell would have the unusual qualification of having been a language officer and a commander in China. Thus he was able to see China from two very different perspectives and weigh the effect of contemporary events on both Chinese and American soldiers. Additionally, battalion command, especially in this period of U.S. Army inactivity and downsizing, would assure a competent officer of continued opportunities to serve. Even more significant to his future career and to history, Stilwell would develop a professional relationship with the Regimental Executive Officer, Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall.<sup>21</sup>

At the completion of his command tour, Stilwell was reassigned to the Infantry School in Fort Benning, to work in the tactics department. By today's standards, his officemates were an impressive array of military heroes; but at that time, Omar Bradley, Matthew Ridgeway, and Courtney Hodges were just a group of lieutenant colonels and majors suspended in the malaise of a peacetime army, working on a staff headed by Colonel George C. Marshall.

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<sup>21</sup> Although Marshall and Stilwell were acquaintances in World War I, their contact never went beyond an occasional greeting or briefing. Now, however, the two had an opportunity to work together for the better part of a year, developing both a mutual respect and friendship.

The 1929 tactics department at Fort Benning was one of the most important professional development organizations in military history. Using the lessons of World War I, Marshall and his staff created a canon of tactical “dos and don’ts” that drove army training and doctrine in the inter-war years. Entitled Infantry in Battle, their book continues to be required reading for the U.S. Army infantry lieutenant and is no less indispensable than Rommel’s Attacks and Sunzi’s Art of War.

The contributions to tactical thought during this period are a credit to the abilities of both Marshall and Stilwell; however, the professional relationship fostered between these two soldiers paid big dividends when they worked together in the future. In the military, mutual respect between two individuals is the single greatest element for effective teamwork. When two soldiers respect one another, both professionally and personally, their ability to cooperate, regardless of rank or position, increases exponentially. Moreover, the professional respect culled through military service together forms one of the stronger bonds between people. Having worked together in both command and staff situations, Stilwell and Marshall were in a position where they could have an intellectual and practical discourse on any situation; they could look at an issue, assess the different forces at work, and then abide by a final decision. Their relationship was a paramount example of professional military conduct.

Following the end of Stilwell’s tour in Fort Benning, he and Marshall went separate ways. Marshall, by 1939, would rise on his own merit to the position of Army Chief of Staff. Stilwell on the other hand received the appointment that he had awaited for the past 15 years: Military Attaché to China.

During his tenure in this position, Stilwell's contact with Chiang Kai-shek increased. It is difficult to anticipate Stilwell's later contempt for Chiang from his earlier contacts with him. In his papers from that period, he merely expresses his military opinion that Chiang's "victories" were not the impressive military spectacles that Chiang himself believed them to be (Tuchman, 195). While in this assignment, Stilwell observed Chiang's army first-hand and examined the critical developments of both the Sino-Japanese and the Nationalist-CCP conflicts, as well as Chiang's technique of managing neither of them.

The timing of his assignment with respect to his forthcoming wartime responsibilities could not have been better. When war broke out and the U.S. Army needed a representative in Asia, Stilwell was professionally in the best position to transition into that post. From the outset, he was assigned many titles: Deputy Supreme Allied Commander of SEAC under Mountbatten, the commander of American Forces in the China Burma India (CBI) Theater, and the Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek. Each role had its peculiarities.

Stilwell's appointment as Mountbatten's deputy served two purposes. Churchill knew that SEAC was powerless without U.S. support, particularly airpower. By agreeing to Stilwell's appointment, Churchill made a show of faith that the U.S. would have a major role in the Asian Theater. From another perspective, the U.S. needed an honest broker in Mountbatten's camp, and hoped Stilwell would make sure that SEAC's overall objective was the defeat of Japan and not simply the reclamation of British colonies.

Stilwell's post as commander of American forces in the CBI resulted from the traditional viewpoint that American soldiers, sailors, and airmen would serve only under

an American commander. The presence of only two major American units, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)<sup>22</sup> and the air forces, meant that this appointment was more symbolic than functional. Nevertheless, both of these units would play major roles until the end of the war.

Finally, Stilwell's role as Chiang's Chief of Staff was necessary from an American point of view, as Stilwell was also the military administrator for lend-lease equipment in Asia. As such, he had the final say of where equipment would go in the theater. On this issue, the relationship between Stilwell and Chiang began to crumble.

Rather than retell the extensive body of work already written on the turbulent relationship between Chiang Kai-shek and General Stilwell, I will instead summarize the main issues of contention between the two men. Stilwell believed that the main effort in the CBI was the road to Burma<sup>23</sup>. Although not completely obvious, this plan made perfect operational sense.

Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the French, unable and unwilling to oppose Japanese aggression in Southeast Asia, predictably capitulated to the Japanese and allowed them to occupy the French colony of Indochina. A curious but familiar synarchy developed in Southeast Asia, whereby Japanese forces ruled the state but allowed the French administration to carry on business as usual.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For an in-depth study on OSS operations in China, see Yu's OSS in China.

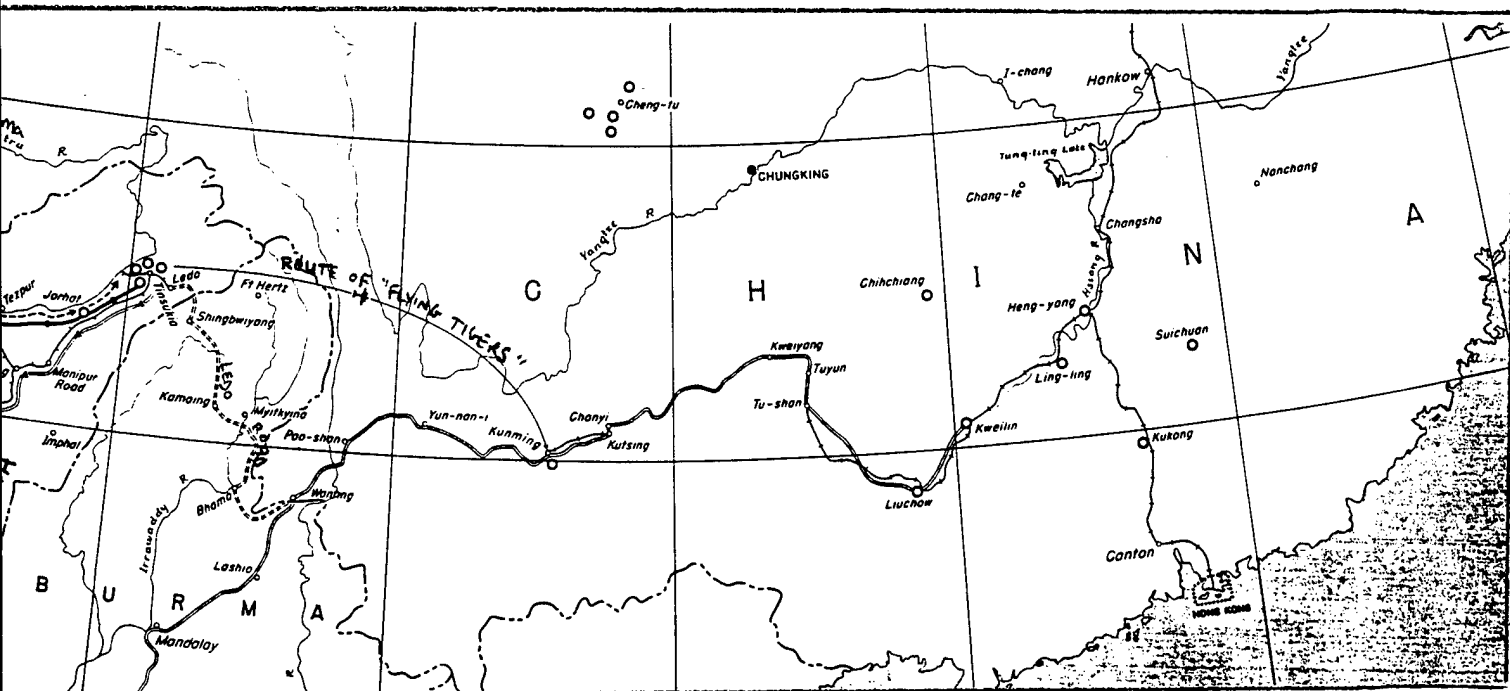
<sup>23</sup> Known as the Burma or Ledo Road.

<sup>24</sup> This conduct by the French should come as no surprise. French administrators throughout France and French Africa, cooperated with Nazi Germany, administering the newly conquered territories for the conquerors.

In the spring of 1942, a multinational force under Stilwell's command was beaten back into Burma by Japanese forces. The significance of this defeat was staggering. With the Japanese now firmly in control of the Northeastern and Eastern China, French Indochina, and the former British colonies of the Malaya and Singapore, Burma remained the only open passageway to Chiang Kai-shek's forces in China. Without Burma and the Ledo Road that linked China to India, Japan could effectively blockade Chiang's forces, eliminating any chance for resupply (see map, page 35). In Stilwell's eyes, if the Allies lost the Ledo Road, the entire lend-lease program would be moot. Therefore, the priority for lend-lease supplies, as well as the associated air effort that facilitated the program, had to be on keeping the road to Burma open.

Here we can observe Chiang's shortsighted and stubborn character at its finest. Unwilling to acknowledge the logic of Stilwell's argument, Chiang insisted that the main effort for lend-lease must be the fighting in China. His argument might have had more merit could we say with certainty that if he were given priority of lend-lease supplies, they would be effectively used in a concerted, soundly executed operation against the Japanese. Evidence, however, was to the contrary. Reports of military liaisons and State Department employees attest that Chiang not only misallocated many of the lend-lease items for his senior commanders and officials in the Nationalist government, but also that he intended to use lend-lease supplies to conduct operations against the Communists.

Following a major lobbying effort to relieve Stilwell of lend-lease control, the General remarked that "if [Chiang] controls distribution, I am sunk. The Reds will get nothing. Only [Chiang's] henchmen will be supplied and my troops will suck the hind tit." (Stilwell, 331) That Stilwell, a mere military officer, had unrestricted control over



Reprinted from Stilwell's Command Problems, by Charles Romanus.

the congressionally mandated supplies that China would receive, hurt the pride of the Generalissimo. Moreover, Chiang took particular issue with the allocation of airpower, seeing air strikes against Japanese targets as the *deus ex machina* that would turn the tide of the war in China.

Airpower was as critical to the lend-lease program as the open line of communication to Burma. Without airlift, the only way to get supplies to Burma would be by using the British rail system through India. However, the British had other intentions for their rail system, as the focus of all British operations was the maintenance of their own colonies, not the war in China against the Japanese. Therefore, American lend-lease supplies bound for Burma on the British rail system got short shrift (Tuchman, 438). On behalf of Stilwell, Marshall appealed to President Roosevelt, explaining that the British system of rail transport priority had "affected the movement of necessary supplies to improve airports and will continue to affect movements over the hump in the future." (Marshall, Papers, 141) The international notoriety that these air missions received would certainly catch FDR's attention.<sup>25</sup>

Inasmuch as Stilwell had an advocate in Marshall he had a more outspoken opponent in Colonel Claire Chennault, commander of American Air Forces in the China Theater. Chennault was a disgruntled Army Air Corps pilot who left the service and was hired by Chiang Kai-shek's Washington lobbyists to run a civil air transport service into China. After proving his abilities in the theater, he accepted a commission and the

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<sup>25</sup> In December of 1941, days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, two squadrons of aircraft piloted by American civilian volunteers conducted a daring attack on Japanese positions, inflicting heavy damage (Chennault, 112). The "Flying Tigers" became legends in American airpower, as they continued to conduct operations from their bases in Burma, flying over the Himalayas to assist the war effort in China.

responsibilities of the air war in Asia. He was, however, still subordinate to Stilwell, and chafed at the mainly logistic role that the CBI commander had given him. Chennault hungered for air combat: he wanted to lead bombing campaigns against the Japanese in China, rather than just flying lend-lease equipment on resupply missions. So, on the point of air resources, Chennault and Chiang found common ground from which to assail Stilwell.

What made the criticisms of both these men so effective is the positions they occupied within the political and populist hierarchies. Chiang's situation was unique. In addition to being the Commander in Chief of Chinese Forces, he was also the effective head of state, and as such, had direct interface with FDR, a privilege that Stilwell did not enjoy. According to John Service, a State Department representative in China, Stilwell could not "demonstrate the unqualified backing of the War Department or the White House, and as consequence, Chiang Kai-shek did not feel compelled to listen to him." (Service, 92) To further illustrate this example, let us say that Marshall had a showdown with Mountbatten. If the conflict were truly unresolvable at a military level, Roosevelt and Churchill would eventually settle it. However, in any kind of impasse between Chiang and Marshall, Chiang could go immediately to FDR for resolution, while at the same time threatening to pull out of the coalition, while Stilwell had to go through Marshall who in turn needed to consult with Secretary of War Stimson.

Chennault's situation, though completely different, was equally as coercive. By 1942, the status of airpower had skyrocketed in comparison with the days of Billy



Mitchell.<sup>26</sup> Everyone recognized that air power would play a decisive role in the combat theater; the public, Congress, and the press all listened closely when an air tactician expressed his opinion. Consider also that Chennault was a public hero. His daring exploits flown “over the hump” had inspired a movie starring John Wayne; Stilwell’s association, on the other hand, was the crushing defeat in and retreat from Burma. No wonder, to the uninformed observer, Stilwell came off as an “antediluvian, foot-slogging diehard who was obstructing victory by airpower,” when compared with Chennault. Thus, the average American believed Chennault when he boasted that Stilwell was misutilizing the air forces. To Chennault and Chiang’s points of view, “whatever means could be used to remove him, including political influence, wire-pulling, and the arts of publicity were justified.”(Tuchman, 430)

Soon after the disagreement over the use of airpower, another issue surfaced which would prove even more controversial: command of Chinese soldiers. Stilwell insisted that he needed large numbers of U.S. combat troops to achieve victory in the CBI. But even though the war planners viewed China as critical to overall victory, they absolutely could not sacrifice combat troops to the war effort there. Marshall wrote Stilwell that the “heavy requirements for our operations against Germany and for our main effort in the Pacific preclude our making available to you the American corps you requested.” (Marshall, Papers, 467) From that point, as a reasonable alternative, Stilwell pushed for direct command over a portion of, if not the entire, Chinese Army.

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<sup>26</sup> Brigadier General Billy Mitchell led the development of American air doctrine in the inter-war years. Succinctly put, Mitchell’s revolutionary approach to airpower advocated “strategic airpower which could strike across long distances...destroying the will of that enemy to resist” (Bradley, 28). Mitchell met opposition not only from the Army, which saw air forces as chiefly supporting ground forces, but also from the Navy, which, at the time, was the nations’ strategic instrument.

This was not a horrible compromise. Despite the bad rap that Chinese soldiers received from objective observers like Service, Stilwell and his teams of trainers had tremendous respect for them. According to one of Stilwell's subordinates, BG Frank Dorn, senior American advisor for the legendary Y-Force<sup>27</sup>, "the Chinese, with training and modern equipment can press an offensive and win." (361) Given the post-WWII influence of Soviet weapons and advisors in China, the prescience of this statement is astounding.

Stilwell believed that the problem with the Chinese Army lay in leadership. During operations in Burma, Stilwell noted that despite the arduous conditions, the Chinese soldiers were "all cheerful," and felt that owing to this level of personal motivation, "they deserve better company officers." (Stilwell, 295) Stilwell's many liaison teams at the two Chinese Army training camps verified his assessment that under the guidance of American commanders, Chiang's soldiers and junior leaders could become an effective fighting force (Gallacchio, 355). A case in point was the famed Yunnan Force—11 relatively well-trained divisions that had received the attention of Stilwell and his advisors. Outnumbering the Japanese by 6 to 1, it seemed like a logical choice to use in any major offensive.

Stilwell had used a large chunk of lend-lease supplies to help train and equip this force. However, because of Chiang's insistence that Chinese forces would only fight under his command, the chances that they would see combat were slim. Chiang refused to use the Y-Force because it represented the successful efforts of General Stilwell, and

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<sup>27</sup> Also known as the Y-Force or YOKE Force.

as such, employing it would be tantamount to accepting Stilwell's theories about American leadership and training of Chinese troops.

At the same time, if the unit continued to lay idle, Chennault wanted to divert its supplies to his air effort. Unable to dispute the logic of Chennault's argument, General Marshall, in a communiqué to the President, wrote, "beginning in April, extra tonnage would be dedicated to the air effort as the use of the Yunnan Force grows less likely each day." (Marshall, Papers, 408) This reallocation of supplies appeared inevitable. Earlier, FDR informed Chiang that "if they [the YOKE Force] are not to be used in the common cause, our most strenuous and extensive efforts to fly in equipment and furnish instructional personnel have not been justified." (Romanus, 310) Stilwell, disgusted but obedient, followed the guidance. His reply to Marshall represents his growing discontent with the entire China situation: "If the Generalissimo won't fight, in spite of all his promises and all our efforts...I recommend diversion...of all tonnage..." (Tuchman, 567)

At this point of the war, Stilwell was losing on all fronts: Chiang denied him tactical success, and Chennault was conspiring to confound his operational plan. A two-pronged attack continued against Stilwell, with Chiang protesting the General's acerbic attitude, uncooperativeness, and actions that bordered on usurpation, and Chennault, claiming that Stilwell did not understand the proper employment of airpower.

Regardless, Stilwell was used to criticism and conflict. He had been in constant opposition with Mountbatten over both the allocation of theatre supplies and the operational strategy in Burma. Soon after his appointment to SEAC there was clamor for Stilwell's recall within the British command structure. When Mountbatten broached the

topic, Marshall replied "My God, Mountbatten, you don't have the nerve to ask me to relieve him when he is the only one who will fight." (Marshall, Interviews, 608)<sup>28</sup>

Ambassador Gauss of China was likewise not a tremendous fan of Stilwell's. Stilwell had a habit of stealing away Gauss's best men. The process by which he did so may seem unfathomable to the procedural minds of today, but it was not unusual in times of war for military officers to take great liberties when executing their duties. Violating normally sacred civilian procedure and process could always be justified in wartime, for were the military to suffer defeat, what civilian would want to be labeled as the one who stood in the way of the army as it attempted to do its job? Nonetheless, Stilwell was in charge, and nothing bothers a diplomat more than a military officer who not only is right, but also exercises his authority while giving little regard for ambassadorial protocol.

Stilwell's other opponents included Joseph Alsop and T.V. Soong, whose unabashed political involvement made a mockery of the military business of fighting the Second World War. Soong, the Harvard educated brother-in-law of Chiang, had both FDR's and congressional ears in Washington. He organized a lobby on the dawn of lend-lease legislation to make sure that China was not left out of the allocation plan (Horn,

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<sup>28</sup> I cannot overemphasize Marshall's support for Stilwell, born of the respect developed through previous assignments together. Marshall, appealing to FDR on Stilwell's behalf, told the President that Stilwell "already had an extremely difficult time with the sluggish British action in India and with the idiosyncrasies of the Generalissimo in China, together with Chennault's methods of circumventing his, [Stilwell's] authority, whenever it is not agreeable with him" (303). Realistically, though, there were limits to what Marshall could do. In coalition warfare, the effectiveness of the organization depends more than any other factor on cooperation between the participants. Eisenhower owed his success as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe to his ability to intervene in a dispute and leave both parties thinking that they had won. His leadership skills and methods of persuasion made it possible for Gen. Marshall to stay out of the leadership squabbles of the European theatre. Unfortunately, no such dynamic existed in Asia. To side unflinchingly with Stilwell in all situations would have spelled disaster for the allied effort in Asia. Were Chennault to sulk like Achilles, the operational air plan would lack effectiveness. If he alienated the British, he would no doubt be stepping on toes, as Mountbatten was the overall commander in theater and really was not beholden to Marshall's directives. Lastly, were Chiang angered enough to bow out of the

326). Alsop, a Washington insider and later the civilian lend-lease administrator in Chongqing, became Chennault's *ad hoc* advisor and a tremendously influential lobbyist. Alsop and Soong became great friends, and with Chennault's assistance, and the encouragement of Chiang, prosecuted the anti-Stilwell campaign in Washington.

To his credit, FDR did not allow Soong or Chiang to goad him into becoming more involved than necessary in the China operation. He trusted Stimson and Marshall to make the proper decisions, and supported their backing of Stilwell. After a yearlong impasse between Chiang and Stilwell, FDR finally broke the deadlock in 1943, following the successful Japanese offensive that threatened to push Chiang's forces out of China. Stilwell's pleas for direct control over Chinese forces made more sense now than ever. FDR wrote to Chiang that

drastic measures must be taken immediately if the situation is to be saved. The critical situation which now exists, in my opinion calls for the delegation to one individual of the power to coordinate all the allied military resources in China, including the communist forces.  
(Romanus, 310)

History truly turned on this last phrase, not only for the remainder of the war against Japan, but also for the war in Korea, and even for Sino-U.S. relations in this century.<sup>29</sup>

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coalition, that would be nothing less than a major diplomatic incident which would involve the heads of state of the Big Three.

<sup>29</sup> China was not the only place where Allied-Communist cooperation was considered. Beginning in 1942, the OSS began planning for the use of resistance groups against the Japanese in French Indochina (Patti, 21). Military merit notwithstanding, such operations were extremely consistent with FDR's own personal philosophy that the time for colonialism had ended. Underlying the obvious purpose of any cooperative efforts was a bargain for nationalism, whereby in exchange for assistance in defeating the Japanese, the U.S. would essentially empower these resistance groups. The fact that by war's end they would be sufficiently strong to oppose colonial return, albeit a secondary consequence, was not out of line with Presidential guidance at the time.

Insistence on military cooperation with Communist Chinese Forces was a yet another sticking point in the relationship between Chiang and Stilwell. Stilwell recognized the potential of using the Communists in Yen-an against the Japanese in the North. In a communiqué to Marshall, Stilwell noted the important political “bearing of Chinese Communists relations with the [Chinese] Central Gov’t and with Russia on future developments in China, particularly the North and Manchuria.” (Marshall, Papers, 387)

Stilwell’s impetus for this idea came from the incessant haranguing of John Davies, a Foreign Service Officer based in China. Between 1942 and 1943, Davies wrote several convincing memoranda to Stilwell, explaining the need for and operational advantages of Allied-Communist cooperation. In a final letter, Davies appealed for a military observer group to travel to the Communist camp and at least meet with their leadership (Barrett, 23).

At Stilwell’s subsequent insistence and recognizing the area’s strategic importance, the President sought Chiang’s approval to send observers into north China. That FDR left out any reference to the Communists was no oversight. Shortly after, the mission, led jointly by Colonel David Barrett and John Service, traveled to Yen-an and met with the political and military leaders of the CCP, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Zhu De. Barrett’s main task: the “evaluation of potential contribution of Communists to the war effort.” (Barrett, 28)

Although Stilwell was critical of the Communists as half of the problem in China, he still recognized their potential, both for Sino-U.S. relations and for defeating the Japanese. Colonel Barrett admitted to Stilwell following the General’s recall notification

that the “Communists are capable of fighting and they want to fight under you.”

(Tuchman, 643) Even more valuable was Zhou Enlai’s own public declaration, “I would serve under General Stilwell, and I would obey!” (Tuchman, 592)

The lack of Communist-Nationalist cooperation seriously reduced the Chinese effort against the Japanese. Chiang had positioned 200,000 troops along the geographical boundary of Communist influence, anticipating his future offensive to end their campaign. In response, Zhu De had placed 50,000 of his own soldiers along the same boundary as a security measure. Thus 250,000 Chinese soldiers were kept out of the fight against the Japanese.

In addition to the manpower aspect, there was an operational significance to the Communist forces. The CCP’s operational base was in the northern section of China. One of the many war plans called for a U.S. invasion of China against the Japanese from the north. Were this plan ever to be executed, assistance of the Communist forces in that region would prove decisive.

Finally, a few words on the power of military camaraderie are in order. I have already described the tremendous bond of respect that was forged between Marshall and Stilwell as a result of their military service together. To this day, the U.S. government feels a level of obligation to Taiwan, based on our years of unflagging support to Chiang Kai-shek. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to speculate about the respect that would have formed between the U.S. and the Communists, especially where military forces are concerned, had the U.S. and Chinese Communist forces fought side by side against the Japanese.

In his writings on military affairs, Mao pointed out the positive military effect of “brotherhood and comradeship” developed through mutually endured hardship (Zhang, 18). From the CCP perspective, until the last of the old revolutionaries pass away, there will be a bond between them that rivals any other relationship. Deng Xiaoping owed his very existence during the Cultural Revolution and rise to power in the 1980s to the support of his old revolutionary comrades who fought side by side with him for over 20 years. Ideological differences notwithstanding, some vestige of this kind of relationship could have existed had Communist forces fought under the able leadership of “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell, a respected commander with Chinese interests and Japanese defeat foremost on his mind. The Communists’ respect for this man surely would have affected not only Mao’s decision of “which way to lean”, but also a decision to engage U.S. soldiers in combat.

Instead, the Chinese Communists had little respect for the United States, and viewed American politicians as people who would not fully back their military counterparts. Mao saw a highly politicized regime made of people like Chiang, who were willing to sacrifice effectiveness in fighting the Japanese for petty political loyalties and historic sentimentalism.

Hope for cooperation with the Communists was a long shot. Chiang opposed any unconditional cooperation, fearing that the Communists would make significant gains in the ongoing civil war. Service agreed with Stilwell’s assessment that Chiang’s major concern was not the defeat of the Japanese, but rather his own internal power struggles (Service, 90).



The Dixie Mission would continue, but its goal would never be realized. Still, this does not minimize the contributions of its members. Stilwell knew Chiang well enough at this point, and realized the hopelessness of the proposition at this point of the war. He held some hope, however, that with his newly authorized command of Chinese troops, he might soon make the military gains that would so strengthen his position in China that he could affect an alliance with the Communists over Chiang's objections.

To make FDR's proposal of Stilwell's command of Chinese Forces more palatable to Chiang, Marshall sent Major General Patrick Hurley to China in 1944, as Chiang's liaison officer. Marshall had good intentions: he remarked that Hurley, with his bubbly and upbeat personality, was just the "oil" that the situation needed (Marshall, Papers, 554). However, there were two problems with this idea.

First, the introduction of another general into the theater of operations only worsened the already complicated command structure. For a commander to be effective, he must have a unified command authority. In lay terms, that means that no one under his operational control can say or do things that run counter to his command policies. Although Hurley began as a staunch supporter of Stilwell, his personal and professional position eventually deteriorated into one of support for Chiang Kai-shek over Stilwell. He resigned himself to the idea that eventually someone would have to make a choice between Stilwell and Chiang.

The second problem was Hurley himself. Neither a China-hand nor an operational wizard in his own right, he was clearly the wrong man for the job. He had no knowledge of the complex situation that existed in the Far East and apparently made no

effort to understand it. Although he was briefed, he did not synthesize the information he was given into a comprehensive grasp of the complex situation in China.

Hurley was a consummate politician and diplomat who had served previously as an ambassador and Secretary of War under Hoover. A gregarious and friendly person, he was also easily flattered by Chiang and other officials, quickly becoming sucked into the politicized idyll of the Nationalist regime. Although he had a reputation for shrewdness, he was soon in over his head and did not realize that he was being played as a mouthpiece for Chiang. Before long, he had indicated to Marshall that the problem in China was Stilwell. In retrospect, Stilwell would attribute his recall partly to the fact that he was "Hurleyed out of China." (Tuchman 645)

Despite the appointment of Hurley and FDR's previous 'suggestion' that Stilwell be given command of Chinese forces, Chiang continued to balk. At the end of the summer of 1944, with the British prepared to renew an offensive in Burma, Chiang threatened to confound the operation by removing the Y-Force from the operation. Realizing the gravity of this move, FDR delivered an ultimatum to Chiang:

The only thing we can do now in an attempt to prevent the Jap from achieving his objectives in China is to reinforce your Salween armies immediately and press their offensive, while at once placing General Stilwell in unrestricted command of all your forces. (Stilwell, 297)

To emphasize Stilwell's position as *the* President's representative in China, FDR let Stilwell deliver the message to Chiang personally.

Chiang stood up to this insult and called FDR's bluff. He publicly refused to appoint Stilwell as commander, and FDR had no choice but to recall Stilwell. If he did

not, Chiang would withdraw from the allied coalition, and the entire China Theater would grind to a halt, risking the offensive in Burma and the ongoing operations in the Pacific.

So, on October 18, when Stilwell left China, so did one of the few men that the CCP leadership respected, and who understood the consequences that this situation and our flawed allegiances would have on history. Stilwell returned to the United States, and, after a brush with command in the Pacific that was cut short by the Japanese surrender, left Asia for the last time. Within a year, General Joseph Stilwell died of liver cancer. In one way, his early death was fortunate, for it precluded his public humiliation and vilification before the Senate Committee on UnAmerican Activities.<sup>30</sup> Sadly, Stilwell would not live to realize the absolute prescience of his diary entry of July 1944:

China will have a civil war immediately after Japan is out. If Russia enters the war [WWII] before a united front is formed in China, the Reds, being immediately accessible, will naturally gravitate to Russia's influence and control. The conditions will directly affect the relations between Russia and China, and therefore indirectly those between Russia and the U.S. If we do not take action, our prestige in China will suffer seriously...and the seeds will be planted for chaos in China after the war.

(Stilwell, 321-2)

Within 5 years this exact scenario would unfold, once again bringing the United States back to Asia.

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<sup>30</sup> The following members of the China Theater were discredited before the committee: Colonel Barrett, John Service, John Davies, and George C. Marshall. This list is not all-inclusive. If McCarthy was willing to bring Marshall, then the world's most respected statesman, before the committee, certainly he would have called Stilwell to appear.

Shortly after Stilwell's recall, many of the more influential political and military members of his staff were likewise recalled. These include Col. Barrett of the Dixie Mission, John Davies of the State Department, and Gen. Dorn of the Y-Force. The Communists saw their supporters in the U.S. government disappearing one by one. Perhaps what was most incomprehensible to them was that U.S. support was marshalling even more firmly behind Chiang and his Nationalists, a regime that had proved incapable over the past four years of effectively dealing with the Japanese threat and liberating China.

On April 12, 1945, Franklin Delano Roosevelt died. His death, along with Stilwell's departure from China, would extinguish any hope for U.S.-CCP cooperation. Decisions about China, as with the rest of U.S. foreign policy, would soon be governed by a new doctrine, that staunchly opposed Communist regimes. Tenaciously upholding this policy on the "front line" was Stilwell's replacement, Major General Albert Wedemeyer.

## Wedemeyer, War's End, and which Way to Lean

*"He whose generals are able and not interfered  
with by the sovereign will be victorious"*

---Sunzi<sup>31</sup>

Prior to Stilwell's recall, Albert Wedemeyer was an operations officer on Mountbatten's staff. Harboring an intense suspicion of the Communists, Wedemeyer would do much to alienate them as the U.S. Commander of the China Theater. Where the British had turned China into a battleground for colonial possessions, Wedemeyer would turn it into an ideological battlefield. His unspoken declaration of war against the Communists would prefigure their consequent hostility toward the U.S. in 1950.

Wedemeyer was from the Eisenhower school of career advancement. A mere major in July of 1941, he worked in the War Plans Division in the bowels of the Pentagon. One morning that month, his boss, Brigadier General Gerow, Chief of the War Plans Division, came into the office with an unusual requirement: President Roosevelt wanted to know the "over-all production requirements required to defeat our potential enemies." (Wedemeyer, 16) In characteristic fashion, this request for information began at the White House, rolled through Secretary Stimson's War Department Office, continued downhill to General Marshall's desk, and on to the War Plans Division, where, soon after, and doubtlessly burgeoning with additional guidance, it finally came to rest on Major Wedemeyer's desk.

Wedemeyer produced the Victory Program, essentially a logistics estimate: however, this estimate, in its scope and gravity, was unlike any other in military history.

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<sup>31</sup> Sun Tzu, 78.

The story of its formulation, and the detailed thought and well-wrought assumptions that went into it, stand as one of the greatest testimonies to staff work in military history.

Truly, Wedemeyer's product impacted the mobilization of the allied nations.<sup>32</sup>

Promotions quickly followed, and less than two years later, Wedemeyer was a flag officer in charge of planning operations for Mountbatten's chief of staff, Sir Henry Pownall (Wedemeyer, 251). Although Wedemeyer had been introduced to this theater of war during a yearlong stint shadowing Marshall, he now had an opportunity to influence decision making in the theater by recommending operational plans.

At the same time, Stilwell held the position of Deputy Commander of SEAC, with overall command of the CBI. In contrast to Wedemeyer, who was a planner, Stilwell was an operator. Working in the field and consumed with China, Burma, and the Ledo Road, Stilwell would not be present in India at SEAC Headquarters as much as Wedemeyer, to affect the planning and decision making process.

Wedemeyer's credentials, although commendable, could not approach Stilwell's in terms of knowledge of the operational situation in China and of China's culture, history and people. Stilwell spoke fluent Chinese and had already served several tours in China, both as a liaison officer and as a troop leader. He had been working in the theater since the start of the conflict and already had an excellent grasp of what needed to get accomplished and how best to do it. Wedemeyer on the other hand, had a whirlwind introduction to the area, where he learned that a rather uncooperative, gullible American general was having constant conflicts with the recognized, legitimate government (Wedemeyer, 197).

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<sup>32</sup> For discussion on the Victory plan see Kirkpatrick, An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present.

One example of Wedemeyer's ignorance was his inability to understand the military necessity of Stilwell's greatest project, the Ledo Road.<sup>33</sup> "I did not see much sense," wrote Wedemeyer, "in making great efforts to recapture a jungle area merely to open a mountain road that would carry the veriest [sic] trickle to Chiang's beleaguered Chinese armies." (251) Wedemeyer, for all his insight and intelligence missed the point.

Although understandable, this is not justifiable. Promotion from the rank of major to the rank of major general in two years, desirable for the increased authority, prestige and pay, creates an experience disparity. Lost to Wedemeyer were the formative years of staff and command experience at battalion, brigade, and division levels. No amount of study or innate ability could substitute for the lessons learned working at these levels. Furthermore, before his sudden jettison to the rank of major general, he had served his entire career in the stagnant peacetime army of post-World War I. Now he was in a theater where he had to understand unique cultural and historical tensions as well as the operational level of combat. Needless to say, he was ill prepared for the challenge.

Although Wedemeyer did continue Stilwell's program of training for Chinese soldiers, similarities between the two commanders appear to end there. Wedemeyer shared neither Stilwell's combat tenacity, nor his admiration for the Communists as a fighting force, nor his distrust of and distaste for Chiang Kai-shek. Many credit Wedemeyer for improving relations with Chiang. Whether to cite that as a true achievement is questionable. A military commander's foremost responsibilities are the

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<sup>33</sup> In an ironic turn of events, following the completion of the Ledo Road, Chiang Kai-shek renamed it the Stilwell Road and credited its completion with breaking the siege of China (Tuchman, 652).

successful completion of the mission and the care of his troops. It is the job of the politician to make concessions that improve relations at the cost of overall combat effectiveness. While the latter was anathema to Stilwell, it was of primacy not only to Wedemeyer, but also to Hurley, who would soon trade in his stars for an appointment as the Ambassador to China. They were the perfect complement to one another: Hurley was "50 percent vapor" and Wedemeyer "equally polished and *persona grata*." (Tuchman, 650)

These two men were nails in the coffin of U.S.-China policy. They almost single-handedly legitimized Chiang's generalship ability to the Washington politico, eroded Stilwell's position in China, and after his ouster, discredited his accomplishments. What Hurley would start in 1944, Wedemeyer would finish in 1945, and what Wedemeyer would finish would be the absolute acknowledgment of Chiang's government and utter disregard for cooperation with the Communists.

Wedemeyer, in direct apposition to Stilwell, by his own admission, regarded the Communists as a "menace" to the U.S., but gave no justification for this assertion (Wedemeyer, 365). One suspects whether Wedemeyer truly understood the forces at work in China, the historical precedence of civil war in China, the strengths and weaknesses of the various positions, and the ramifications of a complete breakdown of communication between these two groups. His defenders claim that at one point he advocated cooperation with the Communist Chinese. However, in reality he had only requested a regimental-sized unit of U.S. airborne forces to conduct operations in Communist-held territory (Wedemeyer, 332). Rather than cooperation with the



Communists, this plan smacks of conspiracy, as it would have placed pro-Nationalist forces in position to be used against CCP forces at war's end.

America's final war related show of bad faith and situational ignorance would take place on Hurley and Wedemeyer's watch, after the Japanese surrender in August of 1945. It involved issues of China's territorial sovereignty in two very sensitive areas: Manchuria and Hong Kong. Allied policy in both of these areas brought back some frightful memories of Western excess and Chinese impotency during the latter days of the Qing, a period of humiliation in China's long history.

Following the Japanese surrender, General Douglas MacArthur became Supreme Allied Commander over the entire Pacific Theater, which now included areas under Mountbatten's command. MacArthur was granted this authority in deference to his efforts in defeating the Japanese. The unified position facilitated the disarmament of Japanese soldiers and the liberation of land previously occupied by the Japanese. Ironically, the Allies decided to create a truly unified command only after the Japanese had already capitulated.

There were two enormous difficulties with this straightforward plan. The first was that MacArthur was rather unversed in the situation as it existed in China. For the past four years, he had been fighting the Japanese throughout the Pacific. Although it would be presumptuous to say that he was completely ignorant in the situation in the CBI, we can say, based on its absence from his own memoirs, that he didn't pay it much mind. In MacArthur's defense, when a general is given a mission as critical as the defeat of the Japanese force in the Pacific, with the defense of the United States' Pacific coast implied, his disinterest of a theater under another general's command is understandable.

The second difficulty was foreseeable by anyone involved in the formation of SEAC. Beginning in 1945, a mad scramble began for areas once occupied by the Japanese. This jostle included not only the former colonial powers of France, England, and the Netherlands, but also the Soviet Union and both the Nationalists and the CCP.

Hong Kong had been a British colony since 1842. Surrendered as part of the Treaty of Nanking ending the first Opium War, its territorial status was both an embarrassment and a humiliating reminder of Chinese impotence under the reign of Qing (Tsai, 19). However, the string of British defeats in Asia held more than a sparkle of hope that Hong Kong's century of Anglo rule was now at an end.

This sentiment stirred throughout Asia. The Japanese swept through Southeast Asia beneath a banner of "Pan-Orientalism," vowing to return Asia to Asians and cast out the oppressive colonizers. Nationalist groups followed on the heels of the Japanese invaders, viewing them as liberators.

Nationalism had been fomenting in China for the past 40 years; the British ouster from Hong Kong signaled an end to Western imperialism in the Middle Kingdom. Chiang had also heard FDR's anti-colonial rhetoric and counted on the President's support to keep foreign powers out of Hong Kong after the war's end. However, nobody expected FDR's sudden death and the tremendous policy shift that his successor Harry S. Truman would herald. Where Roosevelt vowed to remain out of the colonial struggle, refusing to pursue any course that would guarantee allied recovery of territories, Truman adamantly supported a return to the *status quo* (Patti, 12).

When MacArthur issued his surrender orders, he stipulated that Chinese forces should receive the surrender of Hong Kong. This decision could not be more rational.

Hong Kong was in China; Chinese forces were less than a day's march from the city; the nearest British forces were in India.

Britain, understandably, was outraged. Churchill vehemently protested to Truman, brandishing treaties and demanding justice. In response, Truman countermanded the Supreme Commander's instructions, ordering Hong Kong to be surrendered to the British. MacArthur didn't have a dog in the fight and reversed his original directive. Wedemeyer and Hurley stood by tacitly.

Realistically, who would expect anything different? Wedemeyer clearly would not protect Chinese interests the way Stilwell had. Anglophilic and thus politically attuned, he had worked side by side with Mountbatten for most of the war. Only a gambler would count on him to protest this injustice to MacArthur or, more effectively, to Marshall.

Truman's decision was not only a complete reversal of FDR's anti-colonial stance, but also strikingly similar to a decision made at the end of World War I. In 1914, following the start of the war, Japanese forces, fighting on behalf of the Triple Entente, occupied the German colony on China's Kiaochow Peninsula. Germany had maintained this colony since 1895, when the treaty ending the First Sino-Japanese War granted European powers spheres of influence in China. During the Versailles talks, China's new Republican government fully expected the return of this former colony. Instead, European powers allowed Japan to retain control (Nish, 24, 30). Assuming the Chinese had forgotten this incident by 1945, they surely remembered it after the U.S. decision over Hong Kong.

The Chinese saw politics win the day again: political maneuverings superseded military decisions that would have helped China. This time, however, there were two substantial breaks from the past. First, this decision affected China, Nationalist and Communist differences aside. More critically, now the senior American military officer in China approved of the decision and offered no input on China's behalf.

In Manchuria a similar outrage occurred. Although Manchuria lacked the colonial associations that made the Hong Kong issue so sensitive, it too had historical baggage that would elicit a peculiar set of emotions. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the frontier areas of Inner Asia were effectively demarcated, as both the Qing Empire and Imperial Russia competed to solidify uncertain claims to this area. Centuries' old concerns over the security of the northern frontier drove China's interest, while primarily economic factors encouraged Russian expansion.

For Russia, the carrot of expansion was the fur of Siberia, a commodity so lucrative that it could lure Russians east from the relative comfort of Moscow, to the spartan frontier, much in the same way Americans were pulled west during the Gold Rush. However, once the Russians reached the Pacific Ocean, they followed the line of least resistance south, into Manchuria. Eventually, they encountered the Amur River. The prospect of a port city at the mouth of this estuary represented an excellent commercial opportunity: goods now obtained in the western reaches of Siberia could be easily placed on ship, taken to a port city and introduced into Pacific trading routes (Mancall, 10).

The difficulty, however, was that the Amur River and its watershed were part of the domain of the Manchus. That Russian fur traders could move into this area with

relative impunity should not be regarded as apathy on China's part. They were able to for the same reason that Gao Yuan was able to infringe on China's northeast frontier 1000 years earlier.

The Manchus were most concerned with the southern part of their territory at this time, and as a result, the northern expanse was lightly garrisoned. The Manchu military effort was focussed southward toward the consolidation of their new empire and the final defeat of the teetering Ming Dynasty. It made little sense to dedicate precious manpower to the defense of a region where, prior to Russian expansion, no threat existed. The region lacked the unity of a single group of inhabitants. Aside from being the Manchu homeland, the northeast corner was populated by a variety of tribal groups, many of which were either loyal to the Manchus or lacked the wherewithal to challenge Manchu might (Oxnam, 162). These factors conspired to make the Qing Dynasty feel that this frontier was relatively secure.

Now the Manchus were not known as the most commercial group of Asians and, therefore, had little interest in the maritime value of the Amur and its port potential. Regardless, nobody could simply encroach on Manchuria, ancestral homeland of the Qing people, in the name of commercialism or anything else for that matter. The possibility that a foreign power could organize the scattered tribes of Manchuria and sway their allegiance away from China, inspired genuine fear (Lee, 42). The Manchus were further alarmed by Russian interest in China proper. Seeing China as key to the lucrative overland trade routes of Central Asia, the Russians increasingly sent intelligence gathering missions to Beijing under the guise of diplomacy (Mancall, 37).

Armed conflicts between imperial forces began in 1652. Before this time, Russian raiding parties moved freely along the frontier regions bordering the Amur. Gradually, detachments of Manchu bannermen confronted the Russian aggression, to inconclusive results. Not until 1657, when the Qing established a permanent garrison at Ningan, were Russian advances checked; following a significant victory in 1660, Russian operations into Manchuria all but ceased (Oxnam 163-5). With Qing power fast approaching its paramount, the emperor Kangxi (r.1661-1722) sought to decisively deal with the Russian threat.

Hostilities occurred sporadically over the next generation. By and by, the Manchus devoted more resources to this troublesome area. Soon, the complete integration and security of this area rose to the forefront of strategic policy. Troop expeditions were increased and forced immigration of Chinese initiated. Finally, in 1689, Russia, fully aware of the power and force projection ability of the Qing Dynasty, concluded a treaty (Fairbank, 152-3). The Treaty of Nerchinsk was the first formal attempt to demarcate the border regions between China and Russia. More significantly, it officially denoted the area to the northeast over which the Chinese Empire would extend.

Following renewed diplomatic difficulties and trade disputes that brought the two countries to the brink of war in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the two nations ratified the Treaty of Kyakhta in 1728. As this treaty detailed the specific process for resolving disputes between the two powers in the future, the frontier was generally stable for the next 150 years (Mancall, 253).

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Qing Dynasty began to decay and both Russia and Japan renewed their imperial aspirations at China's expense. Manchuria went

first to Japan, then Russia, and then back to Japan as consequence of both the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars. Not until 1922 would Manchuria finally revert China's control, and then only until 1931, when the Japanese once again invaded. It remained a Japanese stronghold for the remainder of the war, and consequently, Chinese military influence in the area, whether Communist or Nationalist, was minimal.

Days before the end of World War II, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. In a purely political and cowardly move, Stalin intended to reap the spoils of Japanese capitulation without having to fight them (Clubb, 337). The Soviet Army invaded Manchuria and fought with Japanese forces there until the surrender.

Subsequently, MacArthur directed the Soviets to receive the surrender of Japanese forces and equipment in Manchuria. Like MacArthur's original decision in Hong Kong, this choice was one of expediency, as the Soviet soldiers were in a position to quickly begin the disarmament operation. From a military victor's perspective, few things could be worse than a rogue Japanese army running rampant in Asia. Furthermore, the Soviets had been in direct combat with the Kwantung Army, and knew better than any of the Allies what the enemy's situation and disposition were. Had the Soviets simply accepted the Japanese surrender, demobilized their forces, and then turned the territory back over to China, no one would ever have called MacArthur's decision into question.

The Soviet Union was not so accommodating. Although they successfully accomplished the demilitarization mission, they did so at tremendous cost to China. By the time Nationalist forces were airlifted to Manchuria and 100,000 Communist troops under Lin Biao completed the march north, the Soviets had pillaged Manchuria's

factories and shipped close to \$900 million dollars of industrial equipment back to the Soviet Union (Clubb, 356). For the second time in the war, the Soviet Union, a member of the allied forces, violated the integrity of China, another allied member. This time, however, the Allies were indifferent.<sup>34</sup>

The U.S. failed to react to the violation of China's sovereignty by another allied power. They were however, interested in the appearance of Soviet-CCP collusion. In his memoirs, Wedemeyer assumes that the Soviet Union entered Manchuria to guarantee the Chinese Communists control over this part of China (Wedemeyer, 345). For this reason he ordered Nationalist soldiers to be airlifted to Manchuria, so as to out-position the Communists (Marshall, Mission..., 5). He was convinced that when the Soviet's realized that the Chinese Communists would not beat Chiang's troops to Manchuria, the Soviet's pillaged Manchuria's industrial base so as to deny those resources to the Nationalists. This far-fetched pre-cold war mumbo-jumbo merely displays Wedemeyer's absolute naiveté and ignorance of the situation in China, both of which are inexcusable given his position as the senior U.S. military officer in China.

More accurately, the Soviet motives were absolutely selfish. They entered the war in Asia with an eye on Manchuria's industrial riches. There is no evidence that any communications took place between the Soviet Union and the CCP over postwar

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<sup>34</sup> During World War II, the region of Xinjiang in northwest China, led by the warlord Sheng Shicai, operated with relative autonomy. Initially, Sheng cooperated closely with the Soviet Union and mediated a defense-for-oil agreement in which the Soviets provided military assistance to Sheng's troops in return for rights to the vast Tushishan oil fields. However, after Soviet attention turned toward Stalingrad and U.S. involvement with the Nationalists increased, Sheng, always the opportunist, turned to the Chinese for assistance. The Nationalists leapt at the opportunity to reestablish Chinese influence over a portion of China that was increasingly on the brink of secession. However Nationalist excesses and arrogance failed to win over the many tribal factions of Xinjiang and soon the area was rife with rebellion. In 1942 a Chinese Khazak conflict near the Sino-Soviet border prompted the Soviet Union to intervene by bombing Chinese troops. State Department officials in China responded to this action with outrage (Service, 238).



posturing or assistance. The very fact that Soviet soldiers, as they left, installed Nationalist officials into leadership positions and ordered the Communists out of Shenyang, further attests to their disinterest in the internal struggles of China's two warring groups (Fairbank 379). They had gotten their loot and now just wanted out in the quickest way possible.

This mistake in judgement is just one example of Wedemeyer's errant China thought. Wedemeyer was apathetic about China, either failing to see or choosing to neglect the political ramifications of the outcome. Rather than offering any input into the post war plan for China, Wedemeyer bowed out and stated that as an American commander, he would not "become involved or permit his forces to become involved in the difficulties between the Nationalist Government Forces and the Chinese Communists, Soviet Communists and other dissident elements in China and Manchuria." (361). As these forces were contending in the area of operations under his control, his attitude borders on dereliction. No wonder, he would later become defeatist, confiding to Marshall his opinion that it would be impossible to "affect a working arrangement between the Communists and the Nationalists." (395)

What occurred in Manchuria was yet another chapter in the continuing story of foreign exploitation of Chinese territory. It was a sore spot symbolizing the disrespect with which non-Chinese, especially Western, nations dealt with China. In 1945, rather than taking steps to empower China and reestablish its prewar sovereignty, the U.S., representing the world's most powerful nations, only confirmed China's belief that Western nations respected neither China's ability to govern itself nor its vital interests.

No thanks to Wedemeyer's prodding, the Manchurian issue became the first battlefield in cold war Asia. Washington was so concerned with Soviet intentions in the area that they organized a special mission to investigate it under the guise of mediating the conflict between the CCP and the Nationalists. Choosing someone that the Administration believed both sides would respect, they ordered George C. Marshall out of retirement and back into uniform.

It is commonly accepted that Marshall was sent to China to negotiate a peace between the Communists and the Nationalists. This premise establishes Truman as the open-minded peacekeeper who only wanted what was best for China, whether that was Communist or Nationalist rule. With this impression in place, we can conveniently conclude the story by casting the CCP in the worst possible light, claiming that they were completely unwilling to negotiate.

However, the Administration's true position never even considered giving the Communists a role in the government, but instead espoused the Nationalists as the "only legal government in China." (Marshall, Mission..., 3) Whatever so-called policy existed toward China was adamant on this one fact. The often-neglected footnote to this stance is that "the Sovereignty of the [Nationalist] government was a husk, just as its democracy was an illusion." (Tuchman, 656)

Truman advocated CCP-Nationalist cooperation only insofar as it would help "liberate China, including the return of Manchuria to Chinese (read: Nationalist) control." (Marshall, Mission..., 3) Thus the Marshall Mission's true aim became the application of the American policy to rid China of outside (i.e. Soviet) influence (Stokes, 9). Having done that, they presumed, the foundation of CCP support would undoubtedly crumble,

assuring Nationalist victory. However, “the Communists were not...merely one of the political parties of China different from the rest only because it was armed”. Rather they represented “an independent body with the *de facto* attributes of statehood.”(Tuchman, 656)

Predictably, the underpinning of the American position was flawed: China’s Communists were not under Soviet influence. The U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, George Kennan, even underscored the fact that the CCP had “survived and grown not because of but despite relations with Moscow” (United States..., 119). Since this was obvious to the leaders of the recently ousted CCP, they could only assume that the entire Marshall Mission was a ruse, designed to buy time for the Nationalists. Zhou Enlai would later term this the “Marshall formula” whereby a cease-fire and negotiations would be followed by an offensive (Zhou, “Statement...”, 26).

All of these attitudes or omissions would in total communicate the same message to the Communist leadership in 1949: the U.S. cannot be trusted as an ally, for its politicians know no loyalties. There was a vast difference between the attitudes of Stilwell and Wedemeyer and Roosevelt and Truman, respectively, in relation to events as they unfolded in China. Now, instead of considering China as a nation and its people as a people, the Administration simply saw the Middle Kingdom as a battleground in an ideological struggle.

The marked difference in U.S. attitude both toward foreign policy and the Chinese Communists also sent antagonistic signals to the CCP leadership. FDR’s anti-colonial position echoed self-determination. He had no interest in becoming involved in the political endeavors of colony recovery. By contrast, Truman’s position, as stated in his

own doctrine, although appearing anti-colonial, was actually anti-Communist (Crabb, 124).<sup>35</sup> The Truman Doctrine forced the U.S. to take sides, decide which side was most oppressive, and then side against it; it was a singularly polarizing influence to U.S. cold war thought.

The Soviet Union became the first and most notorious target of this policy. Consequently, in the late 40's, the Chinese Communists became guilty by ideological association. The United States leadership was convinced that China was a puppet of the Soviets, and that the CCP was operating according to the instruction of Soviet party leaders in Moscow.

In theory, the Chinese did look at things in terms of a pan-Communist movement, and there was Soviet Party support of the CCP from its inception in 1922. Although Mao's earlier writings advocate Sino-Soviet cooperation, his opinions, formed during the nascent days of the Chinese Communist Party, were utopian and not practical; Mao had not yet seen the uncooperative nature of the Soviets.

During the war, however, many began to recognize that the Chinese Communists were not "communists" in the sense that the Soviets were. Ambassador Kennan of the Soviet Union noted that the CCP was the "most mature of all Communist Parties", having "developed its own brand of Marxism" (United States..., 119). Members of the Dixie Mission, Stilwell, Marshall, and Roosevelt all demonstrated their understanding of the CCP's particular status by referring to them as "so-called Communists". Even Chiang

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<sup>35</sup> The most obvious example of Truman's pro-colonial attitude is his support of France in the First Vietnamese War.

Kai-shek himself, for all his hatred and distrust of the Communists, admitted that the Soviet Union was not backing the CCP (Clubb, 334).

World War II experiences with the Soviet Union undoubtedly altered Mao's earlier, naïve prospects of cooperation with the Soviets. By 1945, based on the Soviet conduct in Manchuria, anti-Soviet sentiment in China was likely very high. Even in 1949, following the CCP victory, Mao had not decided "which way to lean" (Stokes, 12). At this point, the Chinese Communists viewed the Soviets as competitors for an Inner Asian land grab that would impact their own external security (Rossabi, 262). Thus, if a Sino-Soviet alliance was not self-fulfilling, then a Sino-U.S. agreement, particularly with the CCP, was a possibility.

Today, we commend ourselves for having chosen to "indefinitely underwrite a politically bankrupt regime" rather than ally with the would-be friends of our enemy (Tuchman, 641). The head of the Dixie Mission, in 1969, expressed his deepest regret for having ever advocated U.S.-CCP cooperation. He predicated his change of attitude on the horrors inflicted by the Communists on their own people from the many purges, to the famine of the Great Leap Forward, to the carnage of the Cultural Revolution (Barrett, 38).

But consider for a moment how these very same events may have been altered had we engaged the People's Republic of China rather than isolating it. Had the Chinese relied on Western post-WWII models of economic development rather than the inappropriate Soviet model of heavy industrialization, perhaps the calamity of the Great

Leap Forward could have been mitigated.<sup>36</sup> The latter 20<sup>th</sup> century record of countries assisted by the Marshall Plan supports this speculation. Furthermore, as the Cultural Revolution was partly a reaction against those trying to repair the damage of the Great Leap Forward, we can conjecture about how the darkest period in modern Chinese history may have likewise been altered. Based on these possibilities, the true regret is that we did not, at the very least, more thoughtfully consider the proposals of people like General Stilwell and his advisers.

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<sup>36</sup> Some would argue that differing ideologies invalidate this idea. However, no one can say with absolute certainty how CCP ideologies may likewise have altered under the influence of economic reform.

## **Conclusion**

China had many reasons not to become involved in a protracted war against the United States in Korea. Besides having just concluded a long and bloody civil war, the Chinese were still suffering from the aftereffects of Japanese invasion and Soviet occupation. Furthermore, Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Army waited at China's southeastern flank for an opportunity to reclaim the mainland. Finally, there was the historical perspective of a Chinese invasion of Korea that ultimately led to a dynasty's collapse.

Nonetheless, despite all these reasons, and the pressing need for consolidation of their own power at home, the PRC leadership decided invade Korea. They were not only embarking on another military expedition, but also, presumably, taking a tremendous risk by opposing the world's most powerful military. Few things can account for their willingness to take such a risk, for it was a risk that could have realistically led to their government's collapse.

One explanation is that the PRC completely lacked respect for the United States. During World War II, the CCP leadership first saw that the U.S. was not willing to back its own military leaders as they attempted to develop a military strategy that would defeat the Japanese. They additionally observed the Western predilection to allow political interests, rather than operational necessity, determine military strategy. After the war, they experienced U.S. support for other allies at China's expense, and finally they witnessed the U.S. giving their absolute support to a corrupt and inefficient regime based

simply on ideology. Clearly the U.S. was neither China's benefactor nor its protector. China had simply become a platform for U.S. policy in an expanding cold war struggle.

Although some advocated military strategy and foreign policy that had China's best interest in mind, their advice was seldom heeded. General Joseph Stilwell, for one, opposed both the bureaucratic allied command structure that sought to protect its colonial holdings in Asia, and the ineffective government of Chiang Kai-Shek, concerned more about its own power base than defeat of the Japanese. He advocated complete reform of the Nationalist Army, cooperation with Chinese Communist forces, the strategic necessity of victory in China, and the liberation of China from the Japanese. He also perceptively realized that the U.S. must maintain China as an ally both for Asian stability and national security reasons, regardless of whether the Nationalists or the Communists are in charge.

However, the Roosevelt Administration could not reconcile its unflagging sentimental loyalty to Chiang Kai-shek with its support of Stilwell's military strategy. Roosevelt chose to side with Chiang, incorrectly fearing the complete loss of all Chinese support against the Japanese. Coincidentally, Roosevelt's death, soon after Stilwell's recall, would set the stage for President Truman and Stilwell's replacement, Albert Wedemeyer, to prosecute foreign policy and a military strategy that were decidedly pro-Nationalist, anti-Communist, and in some respects, anti-Chinese.

The Japanese surrender in August of 1945 provided the U.S. with an opportunity to enact policy that would benefit the Chinese nation. Rather than seizing that opportunity by restoring China's formerly occupied lands to the Chinese, the U.S. remanded Hong Kong and Manchuria to Great Britain and the Soviet Union respectively.



China saw the tragedy of the Versailles Treaty played out again twenty-five years later: Western powers were deciding China's fate, with little regard for her own sovereignty. Doubtless, in the eyes of China's leadership, whether in the Communist or Nationalist camp, the United States would lose creditability as a true ally. Particularly Mao Zedong, with his yen for history, would regard this move as one of bad faith on the part of the Americans and would remember it bitterly five years later.

During the demobilization of Japan, China became an early player in the ideological struggle of the cold war. General Wedemeyer, overseeing the Japanese surrender in China, misinterpreted Soviet interest in Northern China as evidence of CCP-Soviet collusion, and from that error, envisioned a Soviet-backed, CCP offensive that would destroy the Nationalists and establish Communist sovereignty in a large part of Asia. The Truman Administration took his assessment seriously and reaffirmed their position of support for Chiang Kai-shek, thoroughly alienating the Chinese Communists.

Thus, if the CCP leadership was skeptical of the U.S. after seeing one Administration's lack of support for Stilwell and another's disrespect for Chinese sovereignty, they were likely disgusted with them at the conclusion of the Marshall Mission, which they viewed as a ploy to buy time for the Nationalist Army to mount an offensive. Whatever respect they once had for the United States now vanished under this latest pall of perceived treachery. By 1947, America had lost China, even before the Communists had won it.

The U.S. has yet to redeem itself in the eyes of the Chinese leadership for the military and political decisions made during and immediately following World War II. The Korean War, which was a consequence of those decisions and the lack of respect

they bred, only served to widen the gap between the two countries. To this day that war remains an unfinished war. As the U.S. government agonizes over its China policy, attempting to come to grips with the concurrent issues of human rights, economic reform, and democratization, seven thousand miles away, antagonistic military officers still sit across from each other at a desk in a small shack straddling the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, in the village of Panmunjom. Here languishes the Sino-U.S. relationship.

This vestige of open hostilities serves as a reminder of where errant China policy can lead. The U.S. must now avoid what has been termed a "missionary mind" toward China, namely viewing China as the West wants it rather than as it is (Horn, 346). This was the error in 1944, when support for Chiang Kai-shek was continued at the expense of sound military strategy, in 1945 when the U.S. divided a post-war China between other allied nations, and in 1946, when America gave its unqualified backing to the Nationalists, preferring to see a poorly run non-Communist government in control of China instead of a Communist one.

At one point in recent history, China and America were enemies. The U.S. has considered many countries enemies, but very few have met the true test of that term in armed conflict. Not even the Soviet Union and its former satellites, poised at very brink of conflict in Europe, could make that boast. Now is the time to stop seeing China as enemy, but as China. Only in that way can America begin to restore faith and trust between the two countries and, in so doing, get on with history.

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